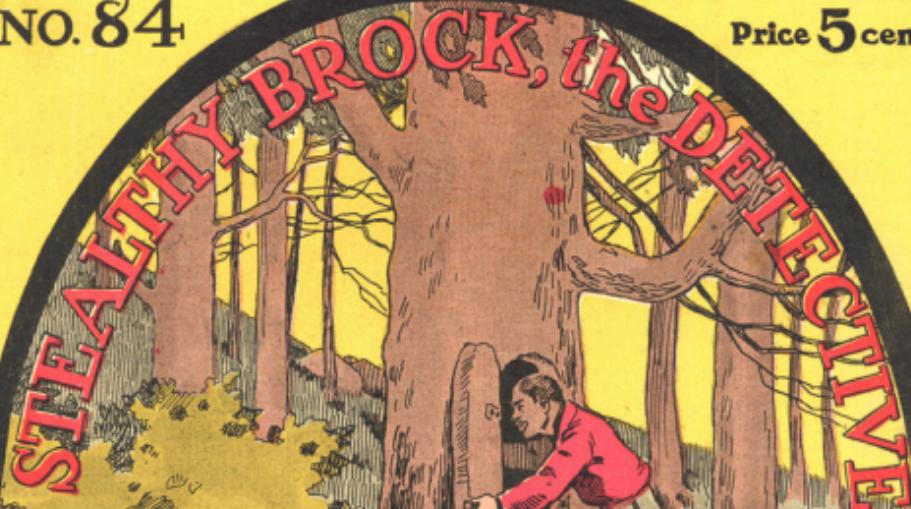




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Price 5 cents



STEALTHY BROCK, the DETECTIVE

THE
NEGRO WENT
TO A BIG TREE AND
OPENED PART OF THE TRUNK.

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A Series of

THE MOST THRILLING DETECTIVE STORIES EVER PUBLISHED

No. 84.

THE ARTHUR WESTBROOK COMPANY, CLEVELAND, U. S. A.

Vol. II.

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Stealthy Brock, the Detective.

By "OLD SLEUTH."

CHAPTER I.

The wonderful chief of the New York detective force was seated in his office when the announcement was made:

"Henry Brock is here, chief."

"Show him in at once," came the command.

A moment later, and a very young man with clear eyes, delicate features, and fair complexion was ushered into the presence of the great thief-taker.

"Halloo, Henry!"

"Halloo, chief!" were the salutations as the men met.

The first is known the world over. The second was unknown to fame, and yet he was a hero and a man who had performed great detective feats.

We have said Henry Brock was a very young man. We mean, very young for a man who was even then a veteran detective officer. He was not over thirty, and wonderfully handsome. Our expression is not an exaggeration. A handsomer man is rarely met with in a day's walk. He was of slender build, about the average height, and very refined and delicate in appearance, and apparently gentle in his manners.

Few would have suspected that he was a very giant in strength, and brave as a lion—a man who, in the way of duty, would brave any peril; who, under all circumstances, was cool, alert, and active. Our readers will learn more of this truly extraordinary individual as our narrative progresses.

After the salutations, Henry Brock said:

"I received your note, chief. What is up?"

"Henry, I've the case of your life for you."

"All right. That is what I've been waiting for."

"I've a case that will tax all your ingenuity, and I know you are a wonderfully ingenious man."

"Get down to business, chief."

"It's the Vannoy case."

"You've got me, chief."

"What! you haven't heard about it?"

"No."

"How is that?"

"I've been off shooting for two weeks—haven't seen a newspaper—just arrived in town this morning."

"Do you recollect the Branton murder?"

"I recollect reading something about it, but the facts have escaped my memory."

"Robert Branton was a young Englishman. He came to this country with a young American named Vannoy. They had been traveling together on the Continent for years. Branton was very rich. He always carried large sums of money with him. Vannoy murdered him. It was a strange case; but murder will out, you know, and a strange series of circumstances betrayed the murderer. He was tried and convicted on the most convincing circumstantial evidence ever produced in court."

"Yes, I recall some of the incidents. And, do you know, chief, now that I remember reading some of the evidence, I recall certain impressions I received."

"What impressions did you receive?"

"We will not speak of them now; we'll go into that part of it later."

"Vannoy was convicted."

"Well?"

"He was condemned."

"I see. And you are now going to prove his innocence?"

"No, no, my dear fellow. I want you to catch him."

"You want me to catch him?"

"Yes."

"I thought he was tried, convicted, and condemned."

"He was."

"What's come over you now, chief?"

"I want you to catch him."

"Catch him?"

"Yes."

"Open up, chief."

"Well, you have been in the woods?"

"I have."

"The whole country is talking about this case."

"Will you talk plain, chief?"

"Vannoy escaped."

"What! the condemned man escaped?"

"Yes."

"How long ago?"

"Ten days ago."

"And they have not caught him?"

"No; and one hundred thousand dollars reward is offered for his recapture."

Henry Brock's face underwent a remarkable change.

"A hundred thousand dollars reward is offered for his recapture!"

"Yes."

"By whom? Not the city or state authorities?"

"No."

"Who offers the money?"

"The friends of the murdered man."

"The friends of the murdered man offer the money?" repeated Henry in a thoughtful tone.

"Yes."

"Is there no one on the case?"

"Twenty of our best men are on the case."

"I reckon there are enough on it, then, chief."

"They have all been baffled. It's one of the most mysterious cases on record. The condemned man vanished as though he had dissolved into thin air. The whole surrounding country is in a blaze of excitement over the disappearance."

"And one hundred thousand dollars are offered as a reward?"

"Yes."

Henry Brock was very thoughtful for some moments, and then said:

"Chief, there is something very strange and mysterious about this case."

"There is."

"Do you get on to it?"

"It appears you do."
"No, I do not; but that condemned man is innocent, or there is a great 'bluff' being played."
"He is not innocent. No more perfect chain of evidence was ever furnished in a court."
"You are an old hand, chief."
"Yes."
"Yet I am very much surprised."
"You are?"
"Yes."
"Why?"
"To think that you accept apparent facts off-hand."
"Are you starting off with the idea that Vannoy is innocent, Henry?"
"No."
"What, then?"
"It is possible, that's all."
"You are a good reasoner, Henry."
"Thank you."
"What is your idea?"
"Well, the fact that the chain of evidence was so perfect, sustains, in my mind, a possibility."
"What possibility?"
"There is a bad look in the fact that the friends of the murdered man offer such a large reward for the capture of the murderer."
"I have thought of that, Henry."
"Well?"
"I've dismissed all suspicion of their motives."
"You have?"
"Yes."
"On what ground?"
"The evidence."
"It was so complete?"
"Yes."
"Well, it is that fact that rouses my suspicion; but we can never tell."
"Will you take the case?"
"I will. Who has been in communication with you?"
"A man by the name of Ward."
"Where is this Ward?"
"He is stopping at the — Hotel."
"Give me his description."
The chief did as requested, and his description was addressed to a man who held in his memory the man's full measure; and when, after some further talk, Henry Brock left the chief's presence, he was very thoughtful.

CHAPTER II.

THE murder had taken place in the suburbs of a city in the western part of the State of New York, and within an hour succeeding his interview with the chief, Henry Brock was on his way to the scene of the wonderful escape. He was a remarkable man, and while almost every one who knew anything about the case was possessed of one positive conclusion, the detective, through the leadings of a strange intuition, arrived at a directly opposite opinion.

There are many mysteries connected with the reasonings of the human mind. Ofttimes one individual will feel, as it were, under a special inspiration which comes as a sudden ray of light; and this was the case with our detective hero.

The chief had furnished him with a photograph of the escaped criminal, and it was a study of the pictured face that appeared to confirm Henry's opinion.

He was known as Stealthy Brock. It was a well-merited sobriquet; for in his official investigations he was a stealthy man. He proceeded always slowly, and with great precision. He always revolved a case in his mind carefully, and viewed it under every possible side-light. A wonderful intuition guided his considerations, and an excellent judgment governed his conclusions.

He entered a parlor car on the Central Road. He had a long ride before him, and disposed himself for comfort.

Henry did not look like a detective. His appearance suggested a man of means and leisure—a quiet, inoffensive gentleman; but when aroused he was like a lion, and ere he arrived at his destination his more heroic qualities were called into play.

A young lady, possessing a very interesting face, occupied a seat near him. He was attracted by her looks, and as opportunity offered, studied her appearance, and soon he discovered that she was greatly annoyed and very restless under the steady gaze of a man who had taken a seat quite near to her.

Henry Brock was a chivalrous fellow, and exceedingly scrupulous as to the courtesy he believed should be extended to ladies. He watched the man, and soon learned that his attentions to the very comely girl were really insolent. He discerned also that the girl was traveling minus an escort.

Henry determined upon a lateral attack. He fixed his eyes on the man, and placed him under a steady and unrelenting stare. The man at length became conscious of the fact, and he in turn became restless.

He was a large, powerful-looking fellow, while, as has been intimated, Henry was of slender build, and, physically, appeared like a man lacking even ordinary physical vigor. He kept his glance fixed on the insolent fellow, however, and finally the latter made an attempt to look him down.

Henry met the counter-stare without flinching, and it became a silent but bitter pantomime, but a war of great intensity. The stranger, seeing he could not look Henry down, became quite restless, and finally rising from his seat, he approached our hero, and asked in a low tone:

"Can I speak with you a moment in the smoking-car?"
Henry rose at once and accompanied the man to the smoking-car. Fortunately not a single passenger was in the smoker. The man sat down, and fixing his eyes on our hero, asked, in a severe tone:

"My friend, do you know I have been annoyed by your constant stare?"

"Is that so?"
"It is true."
"Well?"
"Did you ever see me before to-day?"
"I do not remember ever having seen you, sir, before to-day."
"Then why do you keep looking at me so closely, and, I will add, insolently?"

"Do you think my gaze is insolent?"
"I do."
"I never saw you before."
"So you have admitted."
"I may meet you again, and I wish to impress your features upon my memory."

"Your staring at me is very impudent."

"Indeed?"
"Yes; and I will not stand it."
"Indeed?"
"You hear what I say?"
"I do."
"Will you cease annoying me?"
"No."

The man looked amazed.
"You are cool."
"Ain't?"
"You are."
"Welly?"
"I will see that you do cease annoying me."
"And you really think it is annoying?"

"I do."
"Then let me tell you that your steady stare at the young lady who has a seat near you is equally annoying to her."

The man's look of amazement deepened, and he demanded:

"Do you know the lady? Are you her escort?"

"No; I am her champion."

"Her champion?"

"Yes."
"And you do not know her?"
"No, sir."
"You are a volunteer champion?"
"I am."

The big man smiled in a grim manner, and said:

"You will get yourself in trouble."

"I will?"

"Yes."
"How?"
"I'll punish you."
"You will punish me?" repeated Henry.
"Yes, I will."
"All right. Proceed and punish me."
"You are very bold."
"Always, when talking to a big 'duffer.'"
"You mean that as an insult?"

"Yes."
"Take that!"
The man struck at our hero a violent blow, which was evaded by the detective, and in return he dealt the man a rap that knocked him over out of his seat. The stranger leaped to his feet; so did the detective. The two men, as stated, were alone in the car. The big man made a second vigorous lunge at Henry, which also was warded off, and in return our hero dealt the man a rap that actually tumbled him over. The fellow, upon rising to his feet, uttered a curse, and rushed in to close with his smaller combatant, but received a terrific blow between the eyes that sent him whirling, and this rap subdued him for the time being, as, rising to his feet, he did not make a third attempt, but said:

"My friend, you are very active."
The man was bleeding; his eyes were swelling.
"Have you anything to say to me, sir?"
"I wish to ask you a question."
"Proceed."
"Do you know the lady?"
"No."
"Why do you champion her?"
"Because I discovered that a big clown was annoying her."
"You have made a mistake."
"Have I?"
"You have."
"Well?"
"You will hear from me again."
"I am at your service any time," answered Henry; and he returned to his seat in the regular car.

CHAPTER III.

THE train dashed on, and at length stopped at the station of a town celebrated for its costly suburban residences and distinguished citizens. Henry saw the young lady gather her traps together and prepare to leave the train.

"Halloo!" was his mental ejaculation. "She gets off here, eh?" Henry watched her from the window, and as she passed through the station gates he probably would have forgotten all about her had he not observed the man whom he had walloped also descend from the train.

"I wonder what this means?" was his thought.

As he was in light marching order, it took him but a second to grasp his gripsack, and he also leaped from the train just as it moved away, and alighted on the side opposite from the station and toward the river. He quickly took up a position behind a freight car standing on a side-track, and a few moments later he beheld the young lady who had attracted him proceeding toward, and an instant later he saw the man who had annoyed her on the cars start to follow.

Henry's position behind the freight car favored his purpose, and in an instant there occurred a wonderful transform. He worked a change, and was prepared to give the big fellow a second flogging, if need be. Under his new guise he stepped out from behind the freight car, ran rapidly up an adjoining street, made a circuit, and reappeared on the main thoroughfare in time to meet the lady face to face, also the fellow who was evidently on her track; and when he met the latter, he advanced straight to him, and seizing hold of him, exclaimed:

"Well, I declare! Thomas, old man, when did you arrive in town?"

"I beg your pardon," said the man; "you have made a mistake."

"I've made a mistake, eh? Well, I guess not!"

The man attempted to thrust the disguised detective aside; but the latter would not be put off, and exclaimed:

"What's the matter with you, old man?"

"I tell you, fool, you are mistaken!"

"I am?"

"Yes, you are. Stand aside and let me pass."

"I'll be hanged if I will let you put me off that way! I am not mistaken. You are Tom Frazer. I know you well enough."

The man made a violent effort to free himself, but Henry clung to him, and a struggle ensued on the public street. A crowd began to collect, and Henry released his man and commenced making the most humble apologies. He was detaining him all the time, and when he finally stepped aside, the detective knew the girl had had time to get far out of sight.

The stranger, as soon as released, started off in the direction the girl had taken, and Henry also quietly followed.

The detective's stratagem proved successful; the girl had disappeared. Her pursuer hunted around in every direction, but failed in getting on her track. Henry enjoyed his discomfiture, and when opportunity offered, again accosted the man, saying:

"My friend, it's strange how I mistook you for some one else."

"Do you belong in this town?"

"Yes, I do."

"You remember when you first met me?"

"Yes."

"Do you remember passing a lady who was walking just ahead of me?"

"Yes."

"Do you know the lady?"

"The one who came on the train?"

"Yes."

"I know her."

"Let's become friends," said the man.

"All right."

"Come with me."

"All right."

"Let's go and get a glass of something to drink."

"All right."

The two proceeded to a tavern, and when they were seated, the stranger said:

"I want you to tell me all about the lady."

"You desire to know all about the lady?"

"I do."

"Why?"

"I am not bound to offer any explanations."

Henry was got up as a poor-looking fellow. The man had looked him over, and had evidently reached a conclusion.

"You are not bound to offer any explanations?"

"No."

"Neither am I, sir."

"I will pay for an answer."

"You will pay me for an answer?"

"Yes."

"All right; shell out."

"Shell out?"

"Yes."

"What do you mean?"

"I've given you an answer."

"I want an explanation."

"Oh, an explanation?"

"Yes."

"And you will pay for it?"

"Yes."

"How is it you are ready to pay for so simple a service?"

"I have said I will offer no explanation."

"How much will you pay me?"

"I will pay you according to the value of your information."

Henry was laying back. Dark suspicions were arising in his mind.

"I may tell you something about the young lady on one condition."

"What is your condition?"

"You are to tell me who you are."

The man smiled, and answered:

"That is immaterial."

"Then I reckon it is immaterial about the young lady."

"I do not know as I need to ask you any more questions."

"That means I can go?"

"Yes."

"Good-day, sir."

The detective left the place, and once outside, he muttered:

"I am wasting time. This fellow is some old bloke in love with a pretty girl. The girl is safe with her friends. I do not think I need waste any more time."

Henry went down to the depot and took a train for Albany. He had missed the express, and upon his arrival in Albany was compelled to wait some hours before proceeding to his real destination.

It was late in the evening when he arrived in the city where the escape of the condemned man had occurred. He was proceeding to his hotel, when suddenly he came face to face with a lady. One moment he gazed, and as she passed on, he exclaimed:

"Great Scott! have I gone mad, or am I haunted?"

The detective's ejaculation was well justified; for the lady he met on the street was the same interesting girl whom he had met on the cars, and he was confronted by a strange mystery.

He had seen the girl leave the cars at a Hudson River town. He had taken the first train that left the town going west; he had left Albany on the first train going still further west; he had seen every passenger on each train, and the girl was not among them; and yet the very first person who attracted his attention, after reaching his destination, was the same fair girl. He was indeed perplexed.

CHAPTER IV.

HENRY did not attempt to follow the girl. He laughingly argued:

"If I am haunted, she will find me. I need not follow her up."

Later that evening the detective received a visit from the ex-sheriff of the county. The man had resigned from his position, urged by mortification at the escape of his prisoner. He was under suspicion of having been bribed to permit his charge to escape.

The moment the detective set eyes on the sheriff he decided that the official was an honest man. All the other detectives who had been on the case had unhesitatingly announced their suspicions of his honesty. Indeed, all their reports had been based on the conclusion that the sheriff was a guilty man, and had at least connived at the escape.

The late official was a young man of good family, and heretofore had borne an excellent reputation.

"Mr. Allen," said Henry, after a few moments' talk, "I have a two-fold purpose in solving the mystery of this escape."

Allen made no reply. He had become inured to suspicion and innuendo.

"I mean to run down your late prisoner and prove your innocence."

The sheriff at once brightened up.

"Prove my innocence?" he repeated.

"Yes, prove your innocence."

"Do you believe I am innocent?"

"I know you are," said Henry.

"You are very kind to say so."

"I only speak as I feel."

"You will change your mind."

"I will change my mind, eh?"

"Yes."

"Why do you think so?"

"When you talk with others you will change your mind."

"No one but yourself will ever convince me of your guilt."

"You are indeed very kind."

"Not at all; I am only doing my duty. It is my duty to get at the truth, and I am satisfied that is is no part of the truth to suspect you."

"Every one else believes me guilty."

"I do not."

"And you mean what you say?"

"Yes, I mean what I say."

"Again I thank you."

"You will look upon me as your friend?"

"I will."

"And you will treat me with perfect frankness?"

"I will."

"How is it you are not under arrest?"

"I am liable to be arrested at any moment."

"Then you expect to be arrested?"

"Yes."

"Why do you not skip?"

"Because I am innocent."

"Has any one in the prison testified against you?"

"I think not, as I learn the keepers are all silent. They have not said that they believed me guilty; nor can I learn that they have expressed any belief in my innocence."

"How do you account for their position?"

"My innocence may be established."

"Well?"

"And I may be reappointed by the governor; in fact, I am still sheriff. I sent in my resignation; the governor holds it; he has not notified me yet of its acceptance."

"Is an investigation going on?"

"I think detectives are hounding me."

"Do you think the man will be recaptured?"

"I do not know."

"You hope he will?"

The sheriff did not answer. The detective noted this fact, and said:

"You do not answer me."

"What did you say?"

"I asked if you really hoped the man would be recaptured."

"I don't know that I indulge any such hope."

Our hero looked surprised, and the sheriff added:

"I believe you are an honest man."

"I am."

"It's strange, but I have warmed right up to you. I think I can trust you."

"You can."

"I feel I can because you are, as I said, a perfectly square man."

"I try to be."

"And you really believe me innocent?"

"I do."

"Then I will speak frankly. I hope Vannoy will never be recaptured."

The sheriff looked around furtively as he spoke.

"That is a strange remark, Allen."

"I know it."

"If this man is recaptured, he can establish your innocence at once?"

"Yes, he can."

"And you say you hope he is not recaptured?"

"That is what I said."

"I trusted you would aid me to recapture him."

"I will not."

"On the contrary, you will rest under the suspicion?"

"I will, and stand trial; yes, and disgrace."

"You must have reasons."

"I have reasons."

"Will you mention them to me?"

"I will. Now, mark me, I swear I had nothing to do with that man's escape, and yet I trust he will not be recaptured."

"In so many words tell me why."

"Because I believe he is innocent."

"You believe he is innocent?"

"I do. There, that is plain talk. Do you still believe in my innocence?"

"I do; and I will go further. I agree with you. I believe Vannoy is innocent."

The sheriff stared, and repeated:

"You believe he is innocent?"

"Yes, I do."

"And you are to capture him?"

"If I can."

"And hand him over to be murdered?"

"Well, that will be a matter for future consideration."

"I will not aid you."

"Oh, yes, you will aid me!"

"Have I made a mistake?"

"How?"

"Have you been deceiving me?"

"No."

"Then what do you mean?"

"If we capture Vannoy, we may prove his innocence."

"I doubt it."

"You do?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"There is a devil on his track."

CHAPTER V.

THE glitter in the detective's eyes was very suggestive when the sheriff uttered the significant words at the close of our preceding chapter, and after a moment, he said:

"So there's a devil on his track?"

"Yes."

"A man or woman?"

"A man."

"Who is this man?"

"I dare not talk."

"You can talk to me."

"You forget."

"What?"

"I have known you practically less than an hour."

"That's so. But you can trust me."

"Tell me your idea."

"About what?"

"The guilt or innocence of Vannoy."

"You ask too much."

"I do?"

"Yes."

"How?"

"I have not had a chance to inquire into the case."

"The circumstances of the murder are well known through the trial."

"What were the circumstances?"

"Vannoy and Robert Branton arrived here one afternoon. They registered at the hotel, had a meal, and then Vannoy bid his friend adieu. Their parting was in the public office of the hotel. That night Branton disappeared, and three days afterward his body was found in the woods."

"Was he fully identified?"

"Yes."

"By whom?"

"A man named Ward."

"Who found the body?"

"A party led by the man Ward."

The detective started, and later drew a note-book from his pocket and made a memorandum.

"The body was found by a man named Ward?"

"Yes; by a party led by the man Ward."

"How was it the man organized a search party?"

"He came to the hotel the very morning following the disappearance. In fact, as far as I can learn, he first suggested that the man was missing."

"And he immediately organized a search party?"

"Yes."

"Did they find the body the first day?"

"No."

"How long before they found the body?"

"It was fully four days after his disappearance."

"And under what circumstances did they find the body?"

"Ward led them to the place. He was searching all alone, and suddenly gave the signal. The party joined him, and found him leaning over the mutilated body."

"The body was mutilated?"

"Yes, beyond all recognition."

"How did Ward identify it?"

"By the clothing, and by certain marks on the dead man."

"The identification was absolute?"

"Yes."

"During the trial did any questions arise as to these identification marks?"

"Yes."

"How was it settled?"

Several reputable witnesses came forward and confirmed Ward's testimony. A military school physical examination was also put in evidence, and two men claimed that they identified the dead man by his features, despite the mutilations."

"Who were these men?"

Witnesses whom Ward introduced, for no one in this county knew either one of the men."

"Ward furnished all the witnesses?"

"Yes."

"How did they connect Vannoy with the murder?"

"Vannoy was last seen with him."

"I thought Vannoy had bid him good-bye and left the town."

Evidence was adduced going to show that Vannoy did not leave the town. Three men swore to seeing him about town after dark."

"Who were these men?"

"Some of our town people."

"Reputable people?"

"Yes; and one man positively swore that he saw Vannoy and Branton walking along the road leading to the wood where the body was found."

"And this witness is a reputable man?"

"Yes."

"Was he positive when he gave his evidence?"

"Yes; he swore the two men stopped and spoke to him and inquired their way."

"And his identification was absolute?"

"Yes."

"What other evidence was adduced?"

A knife and pistol known to have belonged to Vannoy were found a little way off from the body."

"Who found those articles?"

"Ward."

"Who mentioned the fact of the two meeting the witness who testified he saw them going toward the wood?"

"Ward."

"How do you know it was Ward?"

"I asked the prosecuting attorney."

"Do you know the prosecuting attorney well?"

"Yes; he was my friend."

"He was your friend?"

"Yes."

"And now?"

"We are not such good friends."

"What came between you?"

"A few words that I dropped."

"What did you say?"

"I said I thought it was all a conspiracy."

"To whom did you say this?"

"The prosecuting attorney."

"And he has been unfriendly to you since?"

"Yes."

"Then the attorney believes in Vannoy's guilt?"

"He pretends to believe in his guilt."

"What sort of a man is this attorney?"

"I always thought him a good fellow."

"What do you think now?"

"I do not know what to think."

"On the surface the evidence was absolute?"

"Yes."

"Did you ever have any talk with the prisoner after he was convicted?"

"No."

"Then you did not discuss the matter with him?"

"I did."

"I thought you said you did not?"

"I did not talk with him after his conviction."

"But you did talk with him?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"During the trial."

"And what did he say?"

"He said a great deal."

"In the main, what did he say?"

"He said it was a conspiracy."

CHAPTER VI.

It had been a strange and remarkable intuition that had led the detective to form a certain theory. And these perceptive faculties in some people are marvelous. Here was a case where the evidence was seemingly overwhelming, and the brightest men—detectives

who were familiar with all manner of criminal deeds—were unanimous in pronouncing their belief in the absolute justness of the verdict; and yet, in the face of this unanimity, our hero, from the very first moment, formed an opposite opinion.

Was it perception, or was it inspiration, or was it fate—a kindly fate, that at the last moment stepped in? Alas! 'tis true there are stranger things in heaven and earth than dreamed of in one's philosophy.

The detective meditated a long time, and then said:

"And Vannoy pronounced it a conspiracy?"
"He did."
"What did he tell you?"
"Enough to convince me that he is an innocent man."
"How did he so convince you?"
"By testimony that established the fact of a conspiracy."
"Tell me all about it."
"I can not."
"Why not?"
"I am under a promise."
"You can break your promise."
"No."
"Remember, I concur with you."
"You concur with me?"
"Yes."
"How?"
"I believe it is all a conspiracy."
"Well?"
"I propose to establish the conspiracy."
"Vannoy will do that himself."
"He will do it himself?"
"Yes."
"But he is a condemned man."
"Yes."
"They will catch him."
"Never!"
"You appear assured."
"I am."
The detective fixed his eyes upon Allen, scanned his face fixedly a moment, and then said:
"Ah, I see!"
"What do you see?"
"I made a mistake."
"How?"
"You are guilty."
"I am guilty?"
"Yes."
"Of what?"
"Aiding this man to escape."
"That must be proved."
"Now I recall you have not yet declared that you did not aid him."
"I have not so declared?"
"No."
"Are you sure?"
"Yes."
"Then I make the declaration now."
"You positively and absolutely affirm that you did not aid Vannoy to escape?"
"I swear I did not."
"You were glad he escaped?"
"Yes."
"You know who did aid him?"
Allen made no answer.
"You, at least, suspect who aided him?"
Allen still maintained silence.
"See here, Allen; you are not confiding in me."
"I can not betray a confidence."
"I mean to aid Vannoy, if convinced of his innocence."
"You have said you believed him innocent."
"But I must have proof."
"You will get proof, no doubt."
"You can aid me."
"I will aid you."
"Then tell me all you know."
"I can not now."
"I will tell you something."
"Well?"
"I am on the track of Vannoy."
Allen turned pale.
"I can capture him."
Allen became visibly perturbed.
"And I will capture him unless—"
The detective stopped short.
"Unless what, sir?"
"Unless you make a confidant of me."
"I will as far as I can."
"You have communicated with Vannoy since his escape?"
"I have not."
"You swear you have not?"
"I do."
"As a man of honor?"
"Yes, as a man of honor."
"Ah, I see you have not communicated with him directly, but you have done so all the same."
"I have not."
"Not indirectly?"
"Not indirectly."
"You said he would not be recaptured?"
"I meant I hoped he would not."
"How did the man escape?"
"I do not know."

"You suspect?"
"I do."
"What do you suspect?"
"I am not at liberty to tell you."
"Then you are not disposed to aid me?"
"I am."
"You will be surprised when I tell you I think I can lay my hand on Vannoy at any time."
"If you return him to jail and are sincere in all you have said, you will regret it."
"I will?"
"Yes."
"Why?"
"Because you will be the murderer of an innocent man."
"Your belief in his innocence appears to be absolute."
"It is."
"And you have grounds for your belief?"
"Yes."
"Who visited the prisoner in jail?"
"Ward?"
"Before or after his conviction?"
"Before and after."
"Were you present at these interviews?"
"No."
"Did any one besides Ward visit him?"
"Yes."
"Who?"
"A lady."
"Who was the lady?"
"A friend."
"Did she have a hand in his escape?"
"I don't know."
"You do not know?"
"I do not."
"You certainly suspect?"
"Yes, I suspect."
"What do you suspect?"
"I suspect the lady had something to do with the escape."
"Have you announced your suspicion?"
"No."
"Has any one else suspected the lady?"
"No."
"How is that?"
"I am under suspicion."
"Do they not suspect the lady aided you?"
"No."
"This is all very strange."
"Yes, there is a great mystery to be solved."
"There is a great mystery to be solved?"
"Yes."
"Why do you not tell me all?"
"I wish I could," came the answer.

CHAPTER VII.

THE detective felt assured that indeed the sheriff had a great deal to tell, in case he could be induced to talk.

"Now answer plainly and directly," said our hero: "Have you directly or indirectly had any communication with Vannoy since his escape?"

"I have not."
"Have you had any talk with Ward?"
"Yes."
"Did you call upon him?"
"No."
"He called upon you?"
"Yes."
"For what purpose?"
"The prosecuting attorney repeated my declaration to Ward."
"What declaration?"
"My declaration that I believed it all to be a conspiracy."
"And then Ward called upon you?"
"He did."
"And what did he say?"
"He asked me on what grounds I made the declaration."
"And what did you tell him?"
"I told him I reached my conclusion from general observation."
"And what did he say?"
"He threatened me."
"He threatened you?"
"Yes."
"How?"
"He said if I repeated my declaration he would become my bitter enemy."
"And what more did he say?"
"He said he might become my friend."
"And if your friend, what would he do?"
"Prove my innocence in the matter of the escape."
"Did Ward associate intimately with any one?"
"Yes."
"A stranger in this town?"
"Yes."
"What sort of a man is his friend?"
"A big fellow—very aggressive and self-assertive."
"A big fellow, you say?"
"Yes."
There came a look of deep interest to the detective's face as he started in and described the man he had knocked down on the train, and the sheriff exclaimed:
"You know the man?"

"I know him."

"Yes, you must know him. You have described him to a photographic exactness."

"I have?"

"You have."

"And this man is Ward's friend?"

"Yes."

The detective described the appearance of the lady he had seen on the train, and the sheriff turned deathly pale.

"Ah, you turn pale!"

"Have you recaptured Vannoy?" came the question in a startled and eager tone.

"I told you I was on his track. Now, tell me, do you know the lady I have described?"

Allen did not answer.

"Come, answer me, my friend."

"I think I have seen the lady."

"Is she a friend of Ward?"

"No."

"Or the big man?"

"No."

"Of Vannoy?"

"Oh, I would have plenty to tell you if I dared."

"You had better dare; for, you see, I am rapidly closing down."

When the detective first started in to talk with Allen, he had no idea, not the slightest impression of any connection between the man and woman on the train and the Vannoy case, and yet one little word had caused him to ask question, the answer to that question had aroused a certain idea in the most wonderful manner, and in a not less remarkable manner a singular *dénouement* had followed.

"Come, Allen, you will do well, I repeat, to tell me all."

"I can not at present; but—"

"Well?"

"You know the lady you have described?"

"Yes."

"Seek her."

"Well?"

"Ask her questions."

"And what will I gain?"

"Once convince her that you are Vannoy's friend, and you may gain great deal of information—very startling information."

"This lady is not a friend of Ward?"

"No."

"She is of Vannoy?"

"Seek her and convince her that you are Vannoy's friend, and then you will learn something."

"Then there is a lady in the case?"

"I believe there is."

"More than one?"

"I know of but one; and yet—"

The man stopped short.

"Go on."

"There is mystery somewhere."

"Yes, plenty of mystery; but what particular mystery are you thinking of now?"

"You asked me a question?"

"I did. I asked you if there was more than one woman in the case."

"I said I did not know."

"That was your answer."

"And there lies the mystery."

"There lies the mystery?" repeated the detective.

"Yes."

"How?"

"In the question of a woman in the case."

"Explain the mystery."

"I can not; if I could, it would not be a mystery."

"Well, there is something in that."

"Do you know the lady well?"

"No."

"You have seen her?"

"Yes."

"Do you know anything about her?"

"No, not much."

"Take my advice."

"Well?"

"Follow her up."

"And if I do?"

"You may solve the mystery."

"What is the nature of the mystery?"

"There may be two women in the case."

The detective was deeply interested.

"There may be two women in the case, eh?"

"There may be."

"Both friends of the condemned man?"

"I can not tell. I can only repeat it is a great mystery."

"Where is the one woman now?"

"I have not seen her but once."

"You saw her but once?"

"Yes."

"When was that?"

"When she came to visit the prisoner."

"You have not seen her since?"

"I can not swear that I have."

"You can not swear?"

"No."

"What do you mean?"

The sheriff meditated for a long time, and finally said:

"I may have seen her ghost or her double."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE detective immediately made up his mind that he, too, had either seen her ghost or her double, and he regretted at that moment that he had not known more when he saw the original or the apparition.

"You saw her ghost or her double, you say?"

"Yes."

"Where did you see the lady first?"

"In the jail."

"She came to visit Vannoy?"

"Yes."

"You did not see her again?"

"I saw her or her double."

"But was it not the lady who visited the prisoner?"

"No."

"How do you know?"

"I know well enough."

"But why are you so sure?"

"I am sure."

"Tell me how."

"I am a man of close observation."

"Yes."

"The lady who came to the prison was taller than her ghost."

"How much?"

"Well, an inch or two."

"Are you not mistaken?"

"No; I am great on measuring heights with my eye."

"And you are certain they were not the same person—the two whom you suspect you saw?"

"I am not certain, but I very strongly suspect."

"How long after the visit of this lady was it that Vannoy escaped?"

"He escaped that same night."

"Did she call at night to see the prisoner?"

"No; she called in the afternoon."

"And the night following the prisoner escaped?"

"Yes."

"Go on."

"I can tell you no more."

"You are not trusting me."

"I have given you good advice."

"Repeat it."

"Find the lady you saw; convince her that you are Vannoy's friend, and I tell you she will give you a great deal of information."

"Allen, you can give a great deal of information if you choose."

"I can not now."

"You had many talks with the prisoner?"

"Well?"

"From what he said to you, I am sure you were convinced of his innocence."

"Well?"

"Tell me all he said to you."

"I can not now."

The detective was fully assured that the sheriff could tell a great deal if he were so inclined.

"You are doing wrong, sheriff."

"I can not help it."

"It was not observation alone that led you to conclude the innocence of the condemned man?"

"I have nothing to say."

"Do you know the name of Ward's friend?"

"I do not."

"Is the man Ward in town now?"

"I do not know."

"When did you see him last?"

"Several days ago."

"You did not see him to-day?"

"No."

"Nor yesterday?"

"No."

"Nor the day before?"

"I may have seen him the day before."

"You are not certain?"

"I am not certain."

"And he threatened you?"

"Yes."

"And he is the man who will pay the reward?"

"He is the man who has offered the additional reward."

"Do you know you are likely to be tried and punished?"

"I may be."

"The removal from office is not adequate punishment if you are really guilty."

"They may so decide."

"You can escape all this."

"Possibly."

"Why not do so?"

"How can I do so?"

"Confide in me."

The sheriff meditated a moment, and then said:

"You are a very smart man."

"Thank you."

"You met the lady?"

"Which lady?"

"The lady who visited the prisoner."

"I did, if all you say is correct."

"All I have said was the truth."

"Well?"

"You have seen the double?"

"Yes, if she is a double."

"You have seen Ward's friend?"

"Yes, if, as I said, all you have told me is the truth."

"I have told you nothing but the truth."

"Go on."

"Those people are hovering around here. You can work on them. I am compelled to be silent at present."

"And you have given me all the information you can?"

"Yes; and I have given you a great suggestion. Follow my suggestion, and you may get a great deal more information."

"When can I see you again?"

"Any time you elect."

"Are you under surveillance?"

"I think I am."

"Do you know the parties who are watching you?"

"I know who is directing them."

"Who?"

"Ward."

"You have not identified the parties?"

"No."

"Can you accurately describe Vannoy?"

The sheriff again meditated, and then exclaimed:

"How remarkable I did not notice it before."

"Did not notice what?"

"The resemblance."

"The resemblance?"

"Yes."

"What resemblance?"

"Your resemblance to the escaped man."

"My resemblance to the escaped man?" queried our hero.

"Yes; the resemblance is very remarkable and very striking."

"What are you getting at now?"

"It is the truth. It's strange I did not notice it before."

"You are giving me guff now."

"I am not."

"Bah! you know you are."

"I am not."

"And I resemble the man?"

"You do."

"And the resemblance is striking?"

"Very striking."

"Could I make up for him?"

"Indeed it would take but a slight alteration in your appearance, and you might be arrested for him."

"I wish I could feel that you are correct."

"I am, and I can prove it."

"You can prove it?"

"Yes."

"How?"

The sheriff went down in his pocket and produced a photograph.

CHAPTER IX.

THE detective glanced at the picture, and after a long study was led to conclude that there was indeed a slight resemblance.

He then commenced to ask a great many questions as to the personal appearance of the condemned man, his tone of voice, his mode of speech, and concerning any personal or physical peculiarity that might distinguish him.

The sheriff answered all the questions very intelligently, and after a little, our hero said:

"I will meet you to-morrow morning."

"Where?"

"I will meet you; never mind where."

"And at what hour?"

"Never mind time and place. I will meet you."

That same night Henry Brock was busy until near morning. In starting out on the trail he prepared for all manner of tricks and devices. He knew he would have a big job on hand, and he calculated to exert all his wonderful ingenuity in followng up the mystery.

On the morning following his interview with the sheriff he started out, and in his own way he made a great many inquiries concerning the character of Allen. He received all manner of estimates, but those who spoke the most bitterly against him were unanimous in declaring that, up to the time of the escape, they had believed him an honest man. All united, in saying that he was a very shrewd man, and personally very brave.

The detective wandered around the town until he met Allen face to face, and the sheriff stopped and spoke to him.

"Have you been followed to-day?" asked the detective.

"I can not learn that I have; but really I have not watched very closely."

"Have you seen the original?"

"No."

"Or the double?"

"No."

"All right. Wait near here a little while. I have an appointment. I will call and meet you later."

The detective passed on. He had arranged for all that he was doing at that moment. He had a great scheme in his mind. He was laying out to work a great trick. He hastened to his lodging-place. He worked a transform—worked it quickly—and thirty minutes after meeting Allen he appeared before him again under his transformed appearance. He did not stop to speak to him, but passed on. The sheriff permitted him to pass, hardly noticed him, but did glance at him.

The detective was disappointed.

"Hang it!" he muttered, "I've failed. My transformation is no good."

We will here explain that our hero had got himself up for the escaped man. He met Allen just as a throw-off, worked his transform, and then quickly reappeared under his disguise, believing

Allen would mistake him for Vannoy. His *ruse* apparently had proved a failure.

Henry wandered on, and turned down a side street. Then he sought to make a short cut over to his lodging-place, and was walking on in a meditative mood and unobservant, when suddenly a hand was laid on his shoulder. He looked up, and recognized Allen.

"You run a great risk," said the sheriff.

"What do you mean, sir?" answered the detective, pretending not to know him.

"Ah, I know you."

"You know me?"

"Yes, I do."

"Who am I?"

"You are *not* Vannoy."

"Certainly I am not Vannoy. Who is Vannoy?"

"Oh, come off!"

"What do you mean, sir?"

"You are got up wonderfully."

"I am got up wonderfully?"

"Yes; so wonderfully I did not dare to speak to you."

"You did not dare to speak to me?"

"No."

"You talk in a strange manner."

"Oh, come off we have no time to lose."

"Will you explain?"

"Yes."

"Do so."

"You are the New York detective."

"Am I?"

"Yes."

"Well?"

"Your disguise is wonderful."

"It is?"

"Yes; and you run a great risk."

"I do?"

"Yes."

"How?"

"You have a plan?"

"I have."

"It will be spoiled."

"It will?"

"Yes."

"How?"

"Some one who knows Vannoy will see you."

"And then?"

"There will be a circus."

"The disguise is good enough for that, eh?"

"It is good enough for anything. And you have a scheme?"

"Yes, I have a scheme."

"What is your scheme?"

"I am a decoy duck."

"How?"

"I may call up Ward, his man, the lady, or the double."

"Aha! I see."

"All these must know the man Vannoy at sight."

"All of them."

"They will see me."

"Yes."

"They will think I am Vannoy."

"Two to one they do."

"That is just what I want. And now we will work our scheme, and you can aid me."

"I can aid you?"

"Yes."

"How?"

"You are being followed."

"I may be."

"You will meet me under circumstances I will arrange."

"All right."

"Go into the town; act in a strange manner. Go to the railroad station; pretend you are waiting for some one, and you will be followed; when aware that you are being followed, go to a place we will arrange, and there meet me."

"I see through your scheme. It will be all right if I am followed."

"You need not fear; you will be followed."

"Have you seen any one on my track?"

"Never mind; you will be followed."

"Explain."

"It's all right; you will be followed."

"How do you know?"

"I will see that you are."

CHAPTER X.

THE detective went into full explanations. He gave out the full details of his plans, and the sheriff exclaimed:

"You are a genius, indeed!"

"You will aid me?"

"I will; but I do it at my peril."

"You do?"

"Yes."

"How?"

"They will claim then, and have good grounds, that I am in league with the escaped man."

"I have allowed for that, and, what is more, I will bring everything out straight in the end. If Vannoy is innocent, all right; if he is guilty, he should be caught."

"That is true."

"And there will be no risk to you?"
"I will win. My plans are perfect; but I wish to catch this fellow Ward."

"And you want me to start in at once?"

"Yes."

"All I have to do is act mysterious?"

"Yes."

"And then?"

"Go to the place we have agreed upon; that is, as soon as you learn that you are being followed."

"I will start in at once."

The sheriff went away, and the detective worked a second transform. Then he went up into the town. He wrote a note and secured a lad, and he sent the lad with the note to the prosecuting attorney's office.

The prosecuting attorney, Mr. Selleck, was in his office. A lad entered and handed him a note. The gentleman opened it, and read:

"DEAR SIR,—Allen is up to a scheme. He expects some one by rail. He is to meet Vannoy. Communicate with Ward. Allen is at the depot at this moment. Act quickly. Follow him, and you will catch your man." Yours,

"A FRIEND."

The prosecuting officer read and reread the note. Then he meditated. The lad who had handed him the note was waiting.

"Who gave you that note?"

"A man."

"What man?"

"A man I met on the street."

"Do you know the man?"

"No."

"Did you ever see him before?"

"No. He gave me a half dollar and told me to take the note to you."

"Were you to return with an answer?"

"No."

"Do you know what is in the note?"

"No."

"Do you live in town?"

"Yes."

"Did you ever see the man before?"

"Never."

"Would you know him if you saw him again?"

"Yes."

"Come here in about two hours."

The lad went away, and the next minute a man entered the prosecuting attorney's office. The latter leaped to his feet, and exclaimed:

"Great guns! but this is lucky."

"What is lucky?"

"Your coming here at this moment."

"How?"

"Read that, Ward."

The man addressed as Ward was a peculiar-looking individual; not a large man, but a thick-set man, a fellow of great physical strength, and he had an eye that expressed great cunning and subtlety. This man read the note. He did not betray any excitement, but asked in a quiet tone:

"Who sent this note?"

"A friend."

"What friend?"

"Ahl there you have me. You see how the note is signed."

"That is all you know!"

"Yea."

"Do you suspect?"

"No."

"You have no suspicion?"

"No. What do you think of it?"

"I do not know what to think."

"It means something."

"Certainly."

"It may be a trick."

"Hold on!" said the attorney. "It may come from one of the keepers."

"That is a good explanation."

"Then we should attend to it."

"Yes."

"Who will go?"

"I will go myself."

"He will recognize you."

"I will look out for that."

"Will you need my aid?"

"Not immediately."

Ward left the attorney's office, and some fifteen minutes later a man was at the railway station, watching Allen. The latter was on hand, and soon discovered that he was being watched. He waited until the train arrived. He appeared to look for an arrival among the passengers, and then in a meditative mood walked away. The man who was on his track followed him, and Allen muttered:

"Well, well, this is strange. That fellow is disguised, but I know him. There is fun or a tragedy ahead, that is certain. I trust it will be fun."

Allen had received minute instruction; he knew exactly what to do; and again he muttered:

"That New York man knows his business. He wanted Ward. Well, he will meet him."

As stated, Allen had received minute instructions, and he was indeed a man of nerve, and knew just how to obey.

He wandered around town, seemingly in a very pensive mood,

and again he went to the railway station. During all this time Ward was on his track. He awaited the arrival of a second train, and a second time appeared to meet with disappointment. He then proceeded to his own house, and there he hung around until evening. Immediately after dark he started forth. All these hours his pursuer lay around; and again the man muttered:

"How well that New Yorker knows how to change, and what a great surprise he will have in store for this man who is following me. I only wish I could tell him all I know, but..." The man stopped an instant, and then added: "It's all right. The New Yorker will get all the information he wants. He knows how to work it. And won't this man Ward get a surprise!"

It was early in the evening, and Allen proceeded to a house about a mile from town. He entered the house, and there, in the sitting-room, he beheld our hero, under his disguise.

"I am here," he said.

"And you have been followed all the afternoon."

"I have."

"Yes."

"How do you know?"

"It is my business to know things."

"Do you know who has followed me?"

"Yes."

"Who?"

"Ward."

CHAPTER XI

"Do you know if he has followed me here?"

"Yes."

"He has kept up a close chase?"

"Yes. Does he suspect that you know he is on your track?"

"He does not. And now what shall I do?"

"You will remain here."

"That man will come in here?"

"Not now."

"Not now?" repeated the sheriff.

"No."

"Then why did he follow me?"

"He will go for the prosecuting attorney, and he will bring several other friends with him."

"Can he suspect that you are here?"

"He knows I am here."

"He does?"

"Yes."

"How can he know it?"

"I took particular pains to let him know it."

"Did you show yourself?"

"No; but he is looking at me now. He has identified me. Now he goes away. He is excited. He will report to his friends."

"How do you know all this?"

"I will tell you later on; and now I must see to your safety."

"I can take care of myself."

"I have arranged to take care of you, and yet I need you as a witness."

"My witness will be questioned."

"You will be corroborated."

"I will?"

"Yes."

"By whom?"

"I have arranged all that."

"I think I need not question your methods."

"No; I generally arrange all right, and know what I am about." The detective had provided a place for the sheriff, and he put his man away. Nearly an hour passed. The detective sat alone in the room, when suddenly the door opened and a man entered. The intruder was Ward. The fellow was perfectly cool, but he did start a little when the detective said:

"Good-evening, Mr. Ward; I was expecting you."

"You were expecting me?"

"Yes."

Ward stared aghast, but managed to say:

"Then you have determined to give it up?"

"Give what up?"

"You will surrender?"

"No need for me to surrender."

"No need for you to surrender?"

"No."

"What do you mean, Vannoy?"

"What name did you mention?"

"I know you, Vannoy."

The detective assumed a surprised air, and said:

"I fear you are laboring under a misapprehension."

"No, I am not laboring under a misapprehension. I recognize you."

"You recognize me?"

"I do."

"Who am I?"

"Vannoy, the man who is under sentence of death, and who escaped with the connivance of the sheriff."

"What a cad you are, Ward!"

"What a cad I am, eh?"

"Yes."

"Well, you must think me a cad if you believe for one moment that I do not recognize you."

"I am certain that you do not recognize me, old man."

"And I am certain that I do."

"Be careful."

"Oh, I am careful."

"I will make you appear very foolish if you persist."

"You will make me appear very foolish?"

"I will."
"And do you pretend that you are not Vannoy?"
"I am not Vannoy."
"You are cool."
"Am I?"
"You are."
"All right. Come, let's talk business."
"I have no business with you, sir."
"Oh, stop fooling. What's the matter with you?"
"My poor fellow, have you gone mad?"
"No."
"Then what are you talking about?"
"What are you talking about, Ward?"
"This is all nonsense."
"Is it?"
"Yes."
"And you really think I am Vannoy, the escaped murderer?"
"Yes, the escaped murderer."
"And if I were Vannoy, the escaped assassin, do you think I would have made an appointment to meet you here?"
"An appointment to meet me here?" repeated Ward.
"Yes; didn't you make an appointment to meet me here?"
"I did not make an appointment to meet you here. Why, man, you are mad; but I see."
"Oh, you see!"
"Yes."
"What do you see?"
"You are caught, and you think to brazen it out." The detective laughed, and said:
"What is your game in pretending that I am Vannoy?"
"You are Vannoy."
"Why, man, you know well enough if I were Vannoy I'd spring at your throat and strangle you."
"You would?"
"Yes."
"Why should Vannoy desire to strangle me?"
"Oh, come off, man."
"You are talking very strangely."
"Am I, indeed?"
"You are."
"My dear fellow, I am willing to serve you, certainly I will serve you; but do you think for one moment that I do not know your game?"
"Know my game?" repeated Ward.
"Yes, know your game. Vannoy is innocent; you know it. You are putting up a conspiracy, and I will aid you, but please don't attempt to play me."
A look of surprise came to Ward's face. He appeared confused, and the detective proceeded:
"You will not really attempt to gag me with the idea that Vannoy is guilty—really guilty?"
"You are cool. But, Vannoy, your game won't work."
"You still call me Vannoy?"
"I do."
"What's your game?"
"My game is to put you in charge of the prosecuting attorney; and the next time he will see that you do not escape." The detective laughed right out, and said:
"Well, this is all very amusing, unless—" He stopped short, and the man Ward said:
"It will not be so amusing in a moment."
"Ah, yes, it will; and I will turn the laugh on you."

CHAPTER XII.

WARD looked confused, and the detective proceeded, and said:
"I have some important business to talk over with you, and I supposed you made an appointment to meet me here, in order to discuss matters, but you are acting so strangely I do not know what to say."
"Did you make an appointment with a man to meet you here?"
"Yes."
"Who is the man?"
"You are the man."
"I am the man?"
"Yes."
"Who am I, sir?"
"Your name is Ward. You will probably deny that."
"I made an appointment to meet you?"
"Yes."
"And what was the business we were to discuss?"
"And do you forget?"
"I forget."
"You remember you confessed to me that Vannoy was really innocent?"

The man Ward stared in amazement, and repeated:
"I confessed to you that Vannoy was innocent?"
"Yes."
"And you are Vannoy."
"Oh, come off! You know I am not Vannoy."
"Who are you, pray?"
"You know well enough who I am."
"I do—yes. You are Vannoy, the man convicted of the murder of your late friend Branton, and why you are seeking to deceive me, I don't know."
"Are you a fool, Ward?"
"Am I a fool?"
"That is what I asked you. If I were Vannoy would I meet you here, my bitterest enemy? No, no; stop your fooling; or if it is a game, stop your game and talk business. You know well enough you confessed to me that Vannoy was innocent."

"I never did."
"I say you did."
"He is not innocent. I've caught you right here, and I am going to surrender you."
"You are going to surrender me?"
"Yes, I am."
"Don't talk foolish, old man; don't talk foolish."
"I will certainly surrender you."
"You won't be such a fool."
"I will do my duty."
"Well, I declare!" ejaculated the detective. "I think you have really gone mad!"
"Vannoy, I am sorry for you; but it won't do. Why you came here I do not know."
"I came to meet you."
Ward turned pale, but said:
"Do not attempt violence, old man; do not attempt violence. have officers at hand."
"What!" cried the detective.
"I have officers at hand."
"You have officers at hand?"
"Yes, I have."
"Why did you bring them here?"
"I tracked you to this place. And now, Vannoy, I will make you an offer."
"Go on; let's hear your offer."
"Confess to me all the circumstances of the murder of Branton, and I will aid you to get away."
"You have officers here?"
"Yes, I have."
"Bring them in, will you?"
Ward stared.
"You bid me bring in the officers?"
"Yes, I do."
"What eat you mean?"
"I will show you in a moment."
"You really ask me to surrender you?"
"Yes, I do."
Ward blew a whistle, and the next moment the prosecuting officer and two other men, with arms in their hands, entered the room. The supposed Vannoy was perfectly cool, and said:
"I do not understand this."
Ward said, addressing the prosecuting officer:
"There is your prisoner!"
"I do not know about that," was the surprising answer of the prosecuting attorney.
The detective had taken the opportunity, while Ward's head was turned momentarily away, to work a transform. It was a simple change. He had arranged for it, however, and the result of his transform was wonderful. Ward became perplexed.

"Who is this man?" demanded the prosecuting attorney.
"It's your prisoner; it's Vannoy."
"No, this is not Vannoy. What does all this mean?"
"I can answer the question," said the detective.
"All right; you answer the question."
The detective removed all his disguise, and Ward gazed in amazement.
"That man," said the detective, "knows who I am well enough. He will deny it; he wants to shake me; but I am well on to his game. He put up the job to have Vannoy accused of murder. He furnished all the evidence; I aided him; and now he wants to shake me."
"It is a lie!" yelled Ward. "I never saw the man before in my life!"

"There, I told you, sir, he would deny it. He arranged with me to disguise myself as Vannoy. He told me to come here. I did not know what his plan was. I was accustomed to do just as he ordered me to do. He sent a note to Allen, telling him that a certain man would arrive on a train. He then told Allen to come here. He sent you a note telling you that Allen was at the railroad station. Then he followed right in after the note, and you sent him to watch Allen. He arranged all this. He arranged for me to be here. What his game is I do not know, but as I was his accomplice, and as Vannoy has escaped, it may be that he wants to have me hung in his stead. But he will never hang me, as I will make a full confession. Vannoy is an innocent man, the victim of a conspiracy, and that man is the arch-conspirator!"

The prosecuting officer was actually dazed, while Ward listened agast.

"He is a vile man, Mr. Selleck," continued the detective. "I see how he meant to get me in a trap. Your men are around. He knows I am a desperate fellow. He thought I would make a fight, and be killed. Oh, you scoundrel!" continued the detective, fixing a reproachful look on the quivering Ward.

"Who are you?" demanded Mr. Selleck.

"Ask that man," was the detective's answer.

"I never saw the man before in my life," said Ward, looking at the detective.

"Oh, yes; I knew he would deny me!"

CHAPTER XIII.

HENRY BROCK had worked one of the most remarkable detective games ever attempted. He knew the power of impressions, and so skillfully had he arranged and carried out his plans, that Mr. Selleck was really tossing about in a sea of doubt.

"That man is a villain, Mr. Selleck. He owes me money. He does not wish to pay it. He has put up a job to have me murdered. If Branton is dead, that man murdered him. Vannoy is innocent, and that man knows it. Here he is beat at his own game. I suspected him. I was prepared for him. He expected

me to resist, and he thought I would be killed; but no. I was playing against him. You can go, Mr. Selleck. I will call at your office and confess all I know."

"Mr. Selleck," said Ward, "you are being imposed upon by that wretch."

"Who is the man?"

"I never saw him before in my life."

"I must have time to think this matter all over," said Mr. Selleck.

"Arrest that man, sir."

"I can not arrest him."

"You must arrest him."

"If I arrest him, I must arrest you also," came the answer.

"What!" ejaculated Ward.

"You heard what I said."

"And you talk of arresting me?"

"If I arrest that man, I must arrest you."

"Can it be possible you believe that man's story?"

"I can not say I believe his story, but it is all very strange."

"The man is a schemer."

"You appear to be scheming against each other."

"No, sir!" cried the detective. "I am not scheming against that man. I am only working against his schemes. I wonder that you are so blind. He has boasted how he had you under his thumb."

"I wish to ask you one question," said Mr. Selleck. "Did Ward have anything to do with the escape of Vannoy?"

"No, sir; he will give ten thousand dollars to have Vannoy caught and hung. Vannoy is his victim. I can tell you the whole story," said the detective, with cool effrontery.

"You can tell me the whole story?"

"I can."

"Do so."

"Now?"

"Yes, now."

"No, no; not until I can prove my words. I will see you later."

Mr. Selleck hesitated. He began to think it was his duty to arrest both men. If he had been sure of his authority, he would have done so.

"When will you see me?" he demanded.

"Within a few days, sir."

Strangely enough, Ward ceased making any protest, and finally Selleck said:

"Mr. Ward, I wish to see you at my office to-morrow morning."

"I will be there," said Ward.

"I can depend upon you?"

"Yes, sir, you can depend upon me."

"And when can I see you at my office?" asked the prosecuting attorney, addressing our hero.

"I will call upon you, sir, at my own time."

"I have a notion to arrest you now."

"You can arrest me if you choose. Consult Mr. Ward. Ask him if you shall arrest me."

There were reasons, which will be disclosed later on, why Ward did not wish the man arrested.

Mr. Selleck called off his men and walked back toward the town. Ward followed him, and when a short distance away from the house, he said:

"Selleck, I am astonished."

"So am I, sir," was the answer.

"I thought you were a man of brains."

"Go on and explain what you think now, and why you have changed your mind."

"I did not think you could so easily be imposed upon."

"Have I been imposed upon?"

"You certainly have."

"By you?"

"No."

"By whom?"

"The scoundrel in that house."

"Do you think he imposed upon me?"

"Let me explain."

"Proceed."

"That man is one of the murderers. I am surprised you did not fall to the suspicion. You know Vannoy hinted at a conspiracy. He did not attempt to expose one. He made no such defense at the trial. This man is his confederate. He is working the same game. He hinted at a conspiracy. He does not expose one."

"He has promised to do so."

"He has all the facts. If there has been a real conspiracy, why does he not give his facts to you at once?"

"He has promised to do so."

"I will reveal something to you."

"Do so."

"I told you I had never seen that man before in my life."

"You did."

"I told the truth."

"Well?"

"He was disguised so as to resemble Vannoy."

"Yes; but he removed his disguise."

"He did; but there is one fact appears to have escaped your attention."

"Name it."

"His wonderful resemblance to the escaped man minus his disguise."

"You are right; yes, he does resemble the escaped man."

"And do you not suspect the truth?"

"Can it be possible?"

"If your eyes are open, and you at last suspect what I do, it is more than possible; it is a fact."

"What is a fact?"

"That fellow is the brother of the escaped man."

"By gosh! that does look plausible."

"And now all is explained."

The prosecuting officer commenced to laugh, and said:

"You did not get on to my strategy."

"Your strategy?"

"Yes."

"What was your plan?"

"I only pretended to agree with the man. I let him think he was deceiving me, that's all. I thought you saw through it."

"You deceived me."

"I did."

"Yes."

"Hal! how strange! Yes, I saw the resemblance at a glance. I suspected the truth, and I am going to fool that man."

Ward's face brightened up as he said:

"Well, well, you did alarm me. I thought you were deceived."

"Not for one moment."

Here we will say that the prosecuting attorney did not tell the truth.

CHAPTER XIV.

As stated at the close of our preceding chapter, Mr. Selleck did not tell the truth. He had been deceived, and he was deceiving Ward at the same time. He was greatly confused. He had not observed the resemblance until his attention had been called to it, and the resemblance was not striking; but, as we have often declared, impressions are easily created, and it is astonishing how universally correct false impressions are in almost every walk of human experience.

Also, as stated, Ward was pleased. He really believed the prosecuting officer, and asked:

"What is your point?"

"I will draw that fellow's story out."

"I would not listen to him."

"You forget."

"What?"

"Your own statements."

"I do. What did I say?"

"You said he was in communication with the escaped man."

"He is."

"Then do you not see my plan?"

"I do not."

"I will win his confidence, pretend to believe his tales about you, and worm from him a confession that will lead to the finding of Vannoy."

"I do not think it wise for you to deal with him."

"Why not?"

"He is an insinuating rascal."

"I thought you did not know him?"

"I know him, but I never saw him until to-day. I could read his character, however, and realize what a dangerous man he is by the skillful manner in which he played his game to-day."

"He is playing a game?"

"Yes."

"What is his game?"

"He is gaining time for Vannoy, holding the pursuit in check."

"You think that is his game?"

"I do."

"Then my plan is a good one. He certainly knows where Vannoy is hiding."

"I am satisfied Vannoy is not far away."

"What makes you think so?"

"He is a cunning rascal. He knows the risk of attempting to get away with so many on his track, and he is lying in wait around here until the excitement dies out, and this fellow is aiding him."

"Then I repeat my game is a good one."

"He may do you harm."

"How?"

"He is evidently a desperate rascal, and he is playing for a life. He will stop at nothing, and remember Allen is associated with him."

"Is that true?"

"The whole affair as he detailed it to you was the truth; but he sent the note to you and arranged the plan, and Allen was really at the station. The whole affair was a blind. He seeks your acquaintance and confidence, but he will never give you his confidence. His game is to deceive you."

"I may humor him and let him think I am being deceived."

"You will gain nothing, and in some way he will deceive you."

"I think it will be a nice game. I am forearmed and prepared for him."

"But he is surely a wonderful man."

"And you believe Allen is working with him?"

"Yes."

"And what is the game?"

"Evidently large sums of money are being employed."

"Who is putting up the money?"

"I can not tell."

"You are putting up large sums to find him. You have already spent large sums to convict him."

"The murdered man was my relative."

"You never admitted that before."

"I would not have admitted it now if it had not been necessary."

"How, necessary?"

"I have discovered the attempts that will be made to make sure of this man's final escape. I demand justice. I will have it at any cost."

While Ward and Mr. Selleck were talking, a conversation was in

progress in the house. The detective gave a signal, and Allen appeared.

"What do you think of it now?" demanded the detective.

"I do not understand your purpose."

Henry Brock smiled, as he said:

"My purpose was apparent enough."

"I am still in ignorance."

"But have learned something."

"Learned what?"

"Well, you are now assured."

"Assured of what?"

"The truth of the story told to you by Vannoy."

"Will you explain?"

"You heard what Ward said?"

"I did."

"You heard how I drew him out?"

"I still plead ignorance as to your purpose."

"I will explain: When I set out to do a thing, I always verify, when I can, my suspicions. I suspected that Ward was a villain, that he had a purpose in wishing to get Vannoy out of the way. I wished to verify this suspicion, and I have fully succeeded."

"I can not see how."

"When I arranged my disguise, I had no definite plan in my mind. I merely desired to meet Ward and Selleck together. I wished to learn whether or not there was collusion between them; whether I was to fight one rogue or two."

"And what is your conclusion now?"

"I am satisfied that Selleck is an honest man, and really believes in Vannoy's guilt."

"And the other man?"

"I am satisfied that he is a scoundrel, if not a murderer. If Branton is dead, he murdered him. I will have more complete proof later on."

"You will?"

"Yes."

"How will you get it?"

"I am to be watched."

"Surely."

"And murdered, if a chance offers."

"Murdered?" ejaculated Allen.

"Yes, murdered. That man will stop at nothing. And now you and I must come to a plain understanding. You know where Vannoy is hiding. I must see him."

"I do not know where he is hiding."

"You suspect?"

"I do not suspect."

"You can give me a clew?"

"I can not give you a clew."

"You can not aid me at all?"

This last was put interrogatively.

"I can aid you; but I have no clews."

The detective meditated a moment, and then said:

"You are playing against yourself."

CHAPTER XV.

"I AM not playing against anything."

"Allen, there is some strange reason why you do not tell me all you know."

"The reason is a simple one: I have nothing to tell."

"You had long talks with Vannoy while he was your prisoner."

"I did not."

"You had one long talk with him."

Allen was silent.

"He told you the motive governing the conspiracy against him. I must know all he told you."

"Find the woman."

"What woman?"

"The woman who visited him just before his escape, or find her double."

"You can aid me in finding the woman."

"I can not. I have not the slightest clew as to her whereabouts."

"Her double?"

"I know nothing concerning her double."

"There is a mystery under all this."

"You are on the right track; ferret it out."

"But you promised to aid me."

"I have aided you at my own risk. It is now known that I am in collusion with you; but I do not care; I will take all the chances."

"Are you sincere?"

"I am."

"Then watch me to-night."

"What will occur to-night?"

"When I go away from here I will be followed."

"Well?"

"You make it a double follow."

"I will."

Henry Brock proved later on his wonderful foresight when he said he would be followed that night. He gave Allen a few detailed instructions, and after making certain preparations, he stepped forth. He did not go toward the town. He had reasons for not doing so, and a little later his reasons were justified. He had gone but a short distance when he became aware that he was indeed being followed, and he recognized his follower, and he suspected more than he actually knew. He had reached a part of the road that ran through the woods, and when half-way, he heard a whistle, followed by a halloo. He stopped, and a man approached, and as he drew nearer, the detective mentally ejaculated:

"Well done, old man, but I am on to your game!"

The fellow, Ward, had skillfully disguised himself, and drawing near, he said:

"My friend, I am glad I met you."

"Are you?" was the laconic reply.

"Yes; you evidently live around here."

"I am not dying around here just at present."

Ward pretended to laugh, and said:

"I wish to ask you a few questions."

"Fire ahead."

"I am a stranger around here."

"Are you?"

"Yes."

"Well?"

"Strange things have been occurring around here."

"So they say."

"A murder was committed."

"Yes."

"The murderer was caught, tried, and convicted."

"So they say."

"He has escaped."

"So it is reported."

"They tell me he belonged around here."

"Who?"

"The murderer."

"Well, that is no news. The man who was convicted belonged around here. He is a farmer's son."

Ward started, and said:

"I had not heard that."

"Indeed?"

"No."

"Well, you haven't got on to all the facts, then."

"You appear to be well posted."

"I am."

The detective spoke in a very significant tone.

"You have heard the gossip around among the people?"

"Yes, I have."

"They have talked a great deal."

"They are talking all the time, night and day."

"About the murder?"

"Yes."

"What do they say?"

"Who are you, anyhow?" demanded the detective, abruptly.

"Oh, I am a stranger around here."

"You appear deeply interested, all the same."

"I am."

"How is that?"

"Well, I can't tell you now."

"I might say I could not tell you anything."

"Some one else will."

"Then you had better go to some one else."

"No, I like you."

"You like me?"

"Yes."

"How is that—I've won your favor?"

"I can see you are a very smart and observant man."

"Ah, thank you. Now tell me who you are."

"I've said I was a stranger."

"Where are you from?"

"New York."

"Last?"

"Eh?"

"You heard what I said. You came from New York last?"

"Yes."

"That is not your home."

"It is."

"You came from London."

"Did I?"

"Yes."

"How do you know?"

"You give it away in your speech."

"It makes no difference."

"Not to me."

"We waste time."

"Do we?"

"Yes."

"It's all the same to me."

"And to me."

"What do you want?"

"I'd like to hear what the people around here are saying."

"About the murder?"

"Yes."

"And the conviction?"

"Yes."

"And the escape?"

"Yes."

Our readers will observe that the detective was prolonging the talk—going around Robin's barn, as they say. He had a purpose.

"You want to hear what the people are saying?"

"I do."

"Why don't you go and talk to them?"

"I am talking to one of them now."

"The people are saying a great deal."

"Tell me what they say."

"I have no time to waste; it's getting late. I must get to my home and look after my cattle; they have been neglected."

"I'll pay you for your time."

"Will you?"

"I will."

"How much?"

"I'll give you a five-dollar gold piece."

"A sovereign?"

"A half-eagle."
"Let me see the money."
The man Ward exhibited the gold.
"What do you want to know?"
"I want to know what all the people are saying," was the answer.

CHAPTER XVI.

"THE people are saying very strange things."
"So you said."
"They do not believe the convicted man was guilty."
Ward laughed in a strange manner.
"No, they do not believe he is guilty."
"What do they believe?"
"They believe a scoundrel named Ward is the really guilty man."
Ward did not betray any emotion; he merely laughed again.
"Do they say Ward is the guilty man?"
"Yes."
"I have not heard them say so."
"I thought you were a stranger around here."
"I am; but I've asked questions, and I have never heard the least doubt expressed as to the guilt of the rascal Vannoy."
"They didn't talk freely to you, that's the reason."
"Why shouldn't they talk freely to me?"
"Maybe they did not like your looks; I don't."
"You don't like my looks?"
"No."
"You can't see me very well unless you have cat's eyes."
"That's what I've got, and a mouse's ears. I don't like the tone of your voice."
"You are getting impertinent."
"Am I?"
"Yes."
"Well, that's a way I've got. They call me Saucy Pete around here."
"I won't take any of your sauce."
"Oh, you won't?"
"No."
"There is a way to escape it."
"Is there?"
"Yes."
"How?"
"Clear out. If you stay around here you will get plenty of it."
"Do you know I am called Saucy Tom, stranger?"
"Are you, indeed?"
"Yes."
"Well?"
"You have talked pretty plain to me."
"Yes; I meant to."
"I will talk plain to you."
"Fire ahead."
"You said you did not like my looks."
"That's what I said."
"I do not like your looks."
"That's all right."
"You said you did not like the tones of my voice."
"I did."
"I do not like the tones of your voice."
"That's all right."
"I believe you are a scamp."
"Good enough; maybe you are not far wrong."
"I think you are the man I've been looking for."
"Good enough; you've found me, I reckon."
"You won't talk so independent when I get through."
"Is that so?"
"I may tell you who I am."
"I asked you the question once."
"I am a thief-taker."
"Are you?"
"Yes."
"When you catch a thief, you lock him up?"
"Yes."
"I'll tell you what you had better do, my friend."
"Go it."
"The next time you are in a jail, lock yourself in. You will turn the key on a thief, then, I reckon."
"You want to be funny."
"Yes; I am an end man when I am at my business."
"I told you I thought you were a thief."
"Yes; I heard you."
"Did I tell you the truth?"
"You say you are a thief-taker?"
"I am."
"Then you are a professional?"
"I am."
"I won't put my judgment against a professional. If you say I am a thief, you must know; I won't dispute you."
"You take things cool—very cool."
"I won't permit a rascal like you to rile me."
"You asked me who I was?"
"I did."
"I now ask you who you are?"
"That's my business, not yours."
"I told you that I believed you were the man I was looking for."
"Yes, that is what you said."
"Are you?"
"Maybe I am."
"Where were you going when I hailed you?"
"None of your business."

"Where had you been?"
"Again, none of your business."
"Will you go with me?"
"Maybe I will. Where do you want me to go?"
"Suppose I should say to jail?"
"I'd go."
"You would?"
"Yes, I'll go anywhere with you if you will pay for my time."
"Suppose you go without pay?"
"Maybe I will have to go. I don't know."
"You have made some strange statements."
"Have I?"
"Yes."
"About what?"
"The murder, the conviction, and the escape of Vannoy."
"Well! well!"
"I believe you know something about the murder and the escape."
"I do."
"Aha! you admit it?"
"Yes."
"What do you know?"
"I know that Vannoy is innocent, and I know it was men who knew of his innocence who aided him to escape. The same men are on the track of the real murderer—the conspirator who is putting up the job, a wretch who will be beaten in the end."
"You are talking pretty plainly now."
"Yes, I am."
"No doubt as to your meaning?"
"None whatever."
"Go further."
"How?"
"Explain what you mean."
"To whom?"
"To me."
"No, not to you."
"Yes, to me; my friend. I will speak plain now."
"That's right."
"I told you I was from New York."
"Yes, you did."
"I am."
"Well?"
"And I am an officer."
"Are you indeed?"
"I am a detective officer."
"Are you?"
"I am."
"Well?"
"You know where you stand now."
"Yes, I know every foot of ground around here."
"I am speaking sentimentally, or, rather, figuratively."
"I am not up in figures."
"You will understand my figures."
"All right; explain your problem."
"I can arrest you."
"Can you?"
"I can."
"Go ahead."
"You dare not resist."
"Certainly not; I will not resist."
"What will you do?"
"Submit, of course."

CHAPTER XVII.

OUR readers may not comprehend our hero's game; but they will understand it later on. He was displaying great skill. He was raking in good wheat at every turn. He was bothering the man Ward.

"You say you will submit?"
"Yes, I will submit."
"To arrest?"
"Yes."
"Aren't you a fool?"
"I reckon it's possible—I may be. What are you? Aren't you being fooled a little—yes, just a little?"
"Probably you think I am fooling."
"Yes, that's what I think."
"You may think I will not arrest you."
"Yes, that is what I think."
"You may change your mind."
"I may."
"And learn I am in earnest."
"All right."
"You are now my prisoner."
"All right."
Ward advanced and laid his hand on our hero's arm. The latter did not move.
"You understand?"
"Yes."
"You are under arrest now."
"All right."
"And you submit?"
"Yes, I submit."
"I propose to take you to jail."
"That's all right."
"And you really submit?"
"Sure."
"And will you go to jail?"
"Sure."

Ward hesitated, but after a moment put a whistle to his lips and sounded a sharp call, and a moment later three men appeared.

"You see now?"

"Yes."

"What do you see?"

"Three duffers."

"These men are officers."

"I am glad you told me. I would never have suspected it. You had better fall dumb now."

"I had?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"I may speak out before these men and tell what I know about you."

"All right; speak out."

Henry Brock turned to the men, and demanded:

"Are you going to arrest me?"

"We are going to obey orders," came the answer.

"You are going to obey orders, eh?"

"Yes."

"And take all the chances?"

"We are well prepared for all chances."

One man showed a cocked revolver. Henry did not flinch. He merely laughed in a peculiar manner, and said:

"Those are not the chances you are taking. Of course you have no warrant."

Ward here spoke up, and said:

"We do not need a warrant, Mister Man."

"Oh, you do not need a warrant?"

"No."

"These men may need one."

"I see you intend to resist."

"Oh, no; but I want these men to be sure. Here, my dear fellow, look at me—look at me sharp. You may be running up against a stone wall, innocently. Step forward and take a look."

The men did not move. They all appeared to fear some sudden move.

Finally, Ward said:

"Level your guns at him, boys!"

The men drew revolvers, and still Henry did not flinch, but said:

"You all have me covered."

"We have," said Ward.

"All right. Now let your head officer look at me."

The man drew a mask-lantern, slid the shade, and flashed a light in the face of the detective, and at once he recoiled, and ejaculated:

"Great guns!"

"Halloo! what's the matter?" asked Ward.

The man beckoned Ward aside, and said:

"There is a mistake here."

"How?"

"Did you look at that man?"

"Yes."

"Well, he is not your man."

"Yes, he is my man."

"I know better."

"Do you recognize him?"

"Great Caesar, sir! that fellow is a mulatto."

"What?"

"That fellow is a mulatto, I tell you."

"You're mad."

"It's true."

"Give me your light."

Ward advanced and flashed the light in the face of the detective, and a perplexed look illuminated his face.

"What does this mean?" he asked.

The detective laughed, and said:

"Oh, you go back to London, old man. You are too fresh for this climate; you'll rot, you will."

"There is something very strange about all this," muttered Ward; and later he asked: "Were you in that house an hour ago?"

"What house?"

"Were you present when I was talking to a man who looked like Vannoy?"

"A gay old detective from New York you are. But come, mister, send your men away. I want to talk with you."

"You want to talk with me?"

"Yes."

"What do you want to talk about?"

"Vannoy."

"Do you know Vannoy?"

"I do not know him well, but I know you. Send your men away."

Ward led his head man away, and gave him some orders, and the three men drew off.

"That's right," said Henry; "and now let's get down to business."

"What have you to say?"

"I will ask you a question. Are you not satisfied?"

"How satisfied?"

"You have made a fugitive of Vannoy; is not that enough?"

"No, it is not enough," unguardedly answered Ward.

The detective noted the reply, and inwardly chuckled.

"It is not enough, eh?"

Ward appeared to realize that he had been tricked into a very singular and equivocal reply. He was mad.

"What do you want to do? Is it really necessary to kill the man?"

"Who are you? I demand to know."

"Oh, shoot your demand! I asked you a question."

"I am in the interest of justice."

"Are you?"

"I am."

"You lie!" came the abrupt accusation.

Ward recoiled.

"Yes, you lie, and you know it. You are not a detective, you are a fraud; you can not fool me; you are a villain!"

Ward drew a revolver and fired, and at the same instant the three men rushed up.

CHAPTER XVIII.

The pistol-ball missed its mark, and the next instant Ward lay kicking on the ground, and the three men also were downed, and our hero disappeared as though he had really vanished into thin air.

Ward and the three men recovered their feet, and the former exclaimed:

"Where is he?"

The three men were rubbing their heads. Henry Brock had drawn a club, and he had downed the men in good-fashioned hickory style. One of the men said:

"I don't see anything but stars. I don't know where he is."

Ward became thoughtful. He, indeed, had a great deal to think about just at that moment, as our readers will learn during the progress of our narrative.

"You men can go; I will have no further need of you to-night."

The three men walked away. What their thoughts and suspicions were we will not seek to learn. We will follow Ward. The man walked off alone, and, as we have intimated, he was very thoughtful, and as he walked along, he muttered:

"That man is on my track. Who can he be? He used a club. He is a wonderful man. I am in great peril. He manages to hide his identity from me. He also succeeds in adopting disguises that baffle me for the time being. What does he know? What is his object? In whose interest is he working?"

The man meditated a long time, and at length exclaimed:

"Great Jupiter! can it be possible? Yes, as I live, that woman is at the bottom of it. She bribed Allen, and she has enlisted this man in her favor, and he is on my track. Hang her! I wish I could run across her once. Lance Benson saw her once, and he was beaten by a man in her interest, and it must have been this man. He is my Nemesis. Good, I know now my foe. I will attend to him. I will remove him from my path. I had a fortune won, and it is lost unless I remove this man. I will remove him."

In the meantime, Henry Brock had returned to the town. He had assumed a new disguise and appeared once more upon the street. He started to go to Allen's home. He had met the sheriff for one moment after having downed Ward and his pals, and he had directed Allen to go to his home, saying he would join him there during the course of the night. The sheriff's house was just on the outskirts of the town, and Allen was awaiting him. He led the detective into his house, and asked:

"Is it all safe?"

"Is what safe?"

"Are you sure you have not been followed?"

"I am sure I have not been followed."

"You served that fellow out well?"

"Yes; I reckon he has a sore head just now; but the trouble is inside his head at this moment. He is badly bothered."

"I do not understand just what you are up to."

"I am up to solving this mystery. I will do so."

"And you feel assured that Vannoy is really innocent?"

"I am convinced of it."

"I am really glad to hear you say so."

"Do you doubt his innocence?"

"No."

"Then what do you mean?"

"I am expressing my satisfaction that you agree with me, that's all."

The detective held some further talk with Allen, and then took his departure; but before leaving he worked a very decided transform, assuming the character of a very old man.

He walked down toward the railroad station. He knew there was a midnight train to arrive, and he was a man who, step by step, followed every little line that might lead to results.

He had no idea of falling to anything particular, but just deemed it wise to watch every little nook and corner in his slow but steady trail.

He had been at the station but a few moments when he observed a young man, his face hidden under a slouched hat. He possessed a wonderful instinct, and in his mind there came an instant suspicion that there was something suspicious in the actions of the young man.

As we have intimated, Henry followed up every clew, watched every little indication. He was constantly on the alert. His experience had taught him that, at the moment when he least expected it, he was liable to strike a lead.

A little time passed, and the detective made a second very important discovery. He saw the figure of a man reflected in occasional flitterings on a freight car that was side-tracked a little below the station. He had a double watch, and soon became convinced that the first man whom he had seen was restless and observant. He was evidently on some sort of lay, and it also became apparent that there was a fellow hiding behind the freight car who was watching some one, and our hero concluded that he was watching the man in the slouched hat.

The train was delayed; and Henry, in order to avoid suspicion, strolled up and addressed the young man. He desired to distract attention from his own real movements, and also desired to learn if the young man was aware that he was being watched.

Advancing toward the young man, he asked in a feeble voice:

"Do you know if the train is on time or not?"
"It is behind time," came the answer.
"No accident has occurred, I hope?"
"I haven't heard of any."

The young man sought to move away, when the detective stumbled and would have fallen, or so made it appear. The young man caught him, and our hero made a very startling discovery; indeed, he almost betrayed himself by an ejaculation of surprise.

"I thank you," he said to the young man. "I am very feeble."

"It is late for a man of your years to be out."

"Yes, yes, it is very late; but I can not help it. I expect my daughter on the train, and there is no one to meet her, so I came." At the mention of a daughter the young man started, and, less guarded than our hero, he did utter a sudden exclamation.

"You expect your daughter?"

"Yes."

"A child, or a young lady?"

"She is a young lady."

"Where does she come from?"

The detective's answer appeared startling.

CHAPTER XIX.

As has been indicated, a singular, even startling suspicion had settled in the detective's mind, and when the question came, "Where does your daughter come from?" he answered, naming the town where he had seen the young lady whom he had protected alight from the train.

The young man failed to hide his surprise upon receiving the answer.

"You expect your daughter to come from — ?"

"Yes."

The young man appeared to meditate a moment, and then said:

"Ah! I see. She is to accompany another lady?"

"No; she comes alone."

"How old is your daughter?"

The detective named an age that would accord, as near as he could judge, with the age of the young lady whom, as intimated, he had protected, and the young man appeared still more surprised and dumfounded, and he failed to mask his surprise, as stated.

"You appear surprised," said the pretended old man.

"No, I am not surprised; I am only curious."

"Curious?"

"Yes."

"What is there curious about it?"

"I have a young lady friend."

"That isn't curious."

"But she comes from the same town."

"To-night?" demanded the detective.

"Oh, I did not mean she was coming from there to-night; I mean she has been stopping there."

"What is her name?"

"Why do you ask?"

"I may know her."

"Oh, you do not know her."

"I may."

"No."

"Why not? How do you know I am not well acquainted with her?"

"She is only a stranger in that town."

"See here, young man," suddenly demanded the detective, "what is your name?"

"What difference does it make?"

"I'd like to know."

"Why?"

"It's kind of strange."

"What is strange?"

"I am here to meet my daughter from — . You say you know a lady coming from there to-night?"

"I did not say I knew a lady coming from there to-night."

"You didn't mean to say so, but you have let it out."

"No, no. You are mistaken."

"Then, what are you doing here at the station watching for the very train that is to bring my daughter?"

"I am waiting for my brother."

"Your brother?"

"Yes."

"Aha!" mentally ejaculated the detective, as he added this little information to the suspicion that was already running through his mind.

"Does your brother look like you?"

"There may be a family resemblance."

"Does your brother come from — ?"

The young man did not answer. He appeared confused.

"See here, I want you to answer me."

"Old man, what difference does it make to you who I am to meet?"

"It makes a great deal of difference, possibly."

"I do not understand you."

"I may be of service to you, young man, if I am old and feeble."

"You may be of service to me?" repeated the young man.

"Yes."

"You are under a delusion, my good old friend."

"Am I?"

"Surely."

"I reckon not."

"I am not seeking any service."

"But you do not know."

"I do not know?"

"You do not."

"What is it I do not know?"

"Your peril."

Again the young man started and appeared very much perturbed.

"My peril?" he repeated.

"Yes."

"What peril am I in?"

"See I told you that you did not know you are in great peril at this moment."

"What nonsense!" exclaimed the young man.

"It is not nonsense. You are shaking in your boots now." The detective was standing quite close to the young man, and was speaking in very low tones.

"You are mistaken, old man; you think you are talking to some one else."

"I know to whom I am talking, I reckon."

"What is my name?"

"I do not know your name; but I've heard about you in a most remarkable manner. It's strange I should have met you here—yes, very strange, and it's stranger that I should have identified you."

"Identified?" repeated the young man.

"Yes; I've got you down pert enough."

"Then tell me who I am."

"I reckon you know who you are."

"But you say you know who I am."

"Yes, I do."

"That is what I want you to tell me. I know you are mistaken, and when I learn who you suspect me to be, I can correct you."

"You won't start or cry out?"

"Why should I, sir?"

"I am going to say something very startling to you, and I will not speak loud, nor do I want you to betray yourself."

"Betray myself?"

"Yes, that is what I said."

"To whom will I betray myself?"

"You won't scream?"

The young man's trepidation became very apparent.

"Old man, you are mad."

"No, I am not mad. I told you that you were in peril."

"What peril?"

"You are being watched at this very moment."

"Watched?" almost screamed the young man.

"Hist! I told you that you would betray yourself; be careful."

"But what do you mean by all this?"

"You are being watched at this moment."

"I am?"

"Yes."

"By whom?"

"Your deadliest foe."

"Who is my deadliest foe?"

"No need for me to mention; you know well enough."

"I have no foe."

"You will be discreet?"

"Discreet again?" repeated the young man.

"Yes, discreet."

"Certainly I will be discreet, if necessary."

"I said I would say something startling to you?"

"You did."

"And you will not cry out?"

"No."

"The brother whom you are to meet is your sister in male attire!" came the declaration.

CHAPTER XX.

THE detective had said he would say something startling, and from the visible effect of his words it would appear that he had said something very startling.

At the moment Henry spoke, the young man was standing in such a position that the light from the station lamp glared upon his face. The detective had waited for just such an opportunity, and unconsciously the stranger's head had been raised.

Henry saw a convulsion pass over the pale face, and the young man's trepidation was so excessive that for a moment he could not speak.

"I told you I would say something startling."

"Your declaration is as false as it is bold."

"Ah, it is not true?"

"No, old man, it is not true; and I do not know what you mean."

"I told you that you were in peril."

"Yes, you have made a great many strange declarations."

"In your interest."

"In my interest?"

"Yes, in your interest."

"What interest have you in me?"

"A great deal."

"And why? I do not know you. I never saw you before."

"That is true; but what I say is true."

"Then how is it you are interested in me?"

"Will you be very discreet?"

"Yes, I will be very discreet."

"You will not betray yourself?"

"I have nothing to betray."

"We will put it this way: you will not betray me?"

"I will not betray you."

"Then I will say I am interested in you because an enemy is on your track."

"An enemy on my track?"

"Yes."

"I have no enemies."

"You have no enemies?"

"I have not; I am a stranger here."

"Well, let's see; did you ever hear of a man named Ward?"

The young man again started.

"Aha! I see you have an enemy, after all."

"Who is my enemy?"

"This man Ward."

"Why should he be my enemy?"

"You know."

"I have never met the man in my life."

"You have never met him?"

"Never."

"You have heard of him?"

"I have. His name has been quite prominent lately."

"I will go further, then. He is an enemy of one in whom you are interested."

The young man's agitation was very marked.

"Come, come! admit the truth," said the detective.

In a trembling voice the young man asked:

"Who are you?"

"Will you believe me if I tell you?"

"Tell me."

"I will risk it. I am a friend of Vannoy."

The young man was silent a moment, and then he said:

"I do not understand what you are talking about."

"Are you sure?"

"I am sure."

"I will contradict you, and say you do know what I am talking about, and I will add that you need not fear me. I am your friend."

"You are my friend?"

"Yes."

"Why should you be my friend?"

"Because you are a friend of Vannoy."

"The friend of a condemned murderer?"

"Yes."

"Old man, you are mad."

"No, I am not mad, and I will prove myself your friend."

"Can you?"

"Yes."

"Do so."

"I could denounce you."

"Denounce me?" repeated the young man.

"Yes, denounce you."

"Indeed, you are mad."

"No, not mad, but fortunate."

"Fortunate?"

"Yes."

"How?"

"In meeting you. I say I can denounce you."

"How denounce me?"

"You aided Vannoy to escape."

The young man's agitation became very pronounced, and the detective hastened to say:

"You need not fear; I am here to protect you, not to denounce you."

"Do I need protection?"

"Yes."

"Against whom?"

"Ward."

"What harm can Ward mean me? I do not know the man."

"He has ferreted you out."

"Oh, sir, what do you mean? Indeed, you are mad."

"No, I am not mad. Listen to me: you are safe, because I will protect you. I know you are a woman. You are disguised. I will not betray you. I am the friend of Vannoy."

Involuntarily the pretended young man said:

"Spare me!"

"I will do more—I will protect you. But you admit?"

"I admit nothing. But you talk so strangely, I am terrified."

"Men do not become terrified so easily unless they are guilty of something. You are not guilty of any crime; you have nothing to fear."

"But you are surely mad."

"No, no; I am not mad. Listen: Ward is on your track. He is watching us at this very minute. He does not know me. I was watching him, and so met you. I recognized you at once."

"Recognized me?"

"Yes."

"You have made a mistake."

"If you persist in denials, you will do so at your peril, and prevent me from protecting you. Ward is an assassin. You are a woman. We do not know what he might not attempt. You need to be protected to-night."

"Will you tell me who you are?"

"I am one who believes Vannoy is innocent. I believe he is the victim of a conspiracy. I am seeking to run down the conspirators. Ward is the arch-devil. He is watching you at this moment."

"Can I believe what you say?"

"Can you doubt me? Do I not tell you that you are here to meet your sister from —? Do I not tell you that you are a woman. Could I not denounce you? But no. I wish to save you."

"Can I trust you?"

"You can."

CHAPTER XXI.

THERE followed a moment's silence, and way down the track was heard the sound of a whistle. The train was approaching the station.

"Oh, what shall I do?" murmured the young man.

"Trust me."

"What can you do?"

"Protect you. I deceived you. I am not expecting any one on that train. I came here to watch Ward."

"And is he near here?"

"He is."

"Where?"

"He is in hiding."

"And he is here to watch me?"

"He is."

"How did he learn I was here? In fact, how is it he is interested in me at all?"

"He is a villain. He knows some one aided Vannoy to escape. He has a dozen men solving the mystery. He has trailed down to you as having had something to do with the escape. He has identified you as in some way connected with Vannoy."

Again the pretended young man muttered:

"What shall I do?"

"I have told you, trust me."

"Even then what shall I do?"

"You expect some one on the train?"

"I do."

"All right. Here it comes. When it arrives, if your party alights, carry out your original intention. I will take care of Ward. Only give me an intimation where I can meet you afterward and I will explain all."

"I can not tell you where you will meet me."

"Why not?"

"I can not."

"Never mind; I will look out for Ward all the same. Remember, act just as though you had not met me. I will attend to all the rest."

Even as the detective spoke, the train rushed up to the station, and not a single passenger alighted. The detective still stood near the pretended young man, and he said:

"Your friend did not arrive?"

"No."

"When the train starts, go about your business; but, for your own sake, walk slow. Remember, I am an old man."

A moment later and the train moved away, and the pretended young man moved away also.

Henry Brock had made many notes, and he still stood at the station, but his keen eyes were wandering around in every direction, and a minute or two after the departure of the party with whom he had been talking, he also hobbled along.

He had not gone far, however, when he beheld a man walking parallel with him, and he called out:

"Eh, there, friend!"

The man did not stop, and the detective again called out:

"Halloo there!"

The man stopped, and the detective hobbled up to him.

"What's your name?" demanded Henry.

"Is that all you want?"

"Why didn't you stop when I told you to stop?"

The stranger grunted, and said:

"I reckon you are mad."

"Am I? We'll see. What are you doing around here, I'd like to know?"

"Why, you old fool, what is the matter with you?"

"I reckon you are a stranger around here."

"What makes you think so?"

"If you were not you'd recognize me."

"Who are you, anyhow?"

"I am the town constable, and you are a suspicious character. I put you under arrest."

"You're crazy, old man."

"No, I am not crazy. I tell you that you are a suspicious character, and I arrest you—yes, you must go with me to the lock-up."

The man started to move away with a jeering laugh, when the detective suddenly leaped forward and seized hold of him.

"You can't get away. You are under arrest, I tell you."

"Old man, you're mad."

"I am getting mad, and if I do, you'll suffer, that's all."

"Don't delay me."

"I'll delay you until morning, that's sure. I'll find out who you are, you bet."

"I'll hurt you, old man."

"What! You hurt me, the town officer? That's treason. Yes, I knew you were a bad character. Come, you will go with me!"

"Let go of me, old man."

"You will go with me."

"Not a step. Let go of me, I say!"

"I'll not let go of you."

The man exclaimed, "Take that!" and aimed a fierce blow at the detective, and that was just what our hero was inviting. He dodged the blow, raised his cane, and struck the man over the head. The fellow who, as our readers have discovered, was Ward, became furious. He broke loose and made a rush at the old man, when he received several severe blows dealt with tremendous force, and finally Ward fell to the ground, partially insensible. The detective quietly walked away with the remark:

"Another dose for you, villain that you are!"

The fracas had lasted but a few moments at most.

Henry, as stated, walked off, leaving the fellow Ward lying on the ground. The latter was only partially stunned, and was just rising to his feet when a man approached.

"Benson, is that you?" came the inquiry.

"Yes."

"Where were you when I was assailed?"

"I reckon you are confused. Why, did you expect me around?"

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A LUCKY REVENGE.

James Lennox returned to his flat after a long day at the Stock Exchange, and nodded cheerily to his man.

"Just put the evening papers in the smoke-room, Simpson, and you might get me a whisky-and-soda," he said.

"Yes, sir. Excuse me, sir, there's been a person to see you to-day. He's called twice, and said he would call again. He said something about the British Manufacturing Company."

"Did he? Well, show him in if he calls."

Lennox went to his smoke-room and picked up an evening paper.

There, in the financial news, he saw: "British Manufacturing Company's Report. Directors announce a dividend of 35 per cent. and a bonus of 10s. per share. In street dealings, the shares showed rapid advance from 4½ to 7½ on this unexpectedly successful result of the year's trading."

Lennox drank his whisky-and-soda at a gulp.

"And I have to deliver 5,000 shares at 4½ on Friday or pay the difference," he thought. "£15,000! That does for me. I must have as many hundreds to my credit at the bank! I think this estimable journal will record on Friday evening that there was an unimportant failure in the industrial market."

He gazed into the fire and thought how easily he had been trapped. When a discharged employee of the company had come to him with the information that the company's special aluminum welding process had proved a terribly expensive failure, how eagerly he had jumped at the story! He smiled as he thought that he had actually paid the rascal twenty pounds for his false news.

"I wonder who got him to pitch that tale to me," he meditated. "Myers, I should guess. He's been buying heavily. Well, it doesn't much matter who did it. Without money I can't revenge myself."

There came a knock at the door, and Simpson appeared.

"That person I mentioned has called again to see you, sir."

Lennox shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, show him in!" he said.

The next moment a gaunt, ill-dressed, elderly man entered the room.

"Good evening," said Lennox. "Now, may I ask what your business is?"

"My name will tell you that; I'm William Merchant!"

"I'm sorry, Mr. Merchant, but that does not enlighten me in the least."

"And you are one of the leading dealers in British Manufacturing Company's shares. You don't know my name? You haven't heard the name of the man whose brains your company exploited? Didn't they get my best patent from me for a beggarly hundred pounds because I was starving? Haven't they made hundreds of thousands out of it? Haven't they declined to give me a single penny out of the money they exploited me for? And you, the biggest dealer in their shares, pretend not to know my name!"

"I never heard of it before," replied Lennox.

"That's the cruel indifference of the capitalist," began the angry man.

"Now, Mr. Merchant," interposed Lennox, "what do you want with me?"

"The promoter is dead. I have tried to see the heads of the company, but they hide in their offices from me. But you are one of those who have heaped up great fortunes through stealing my ideas. I give you fair warning that I'll be revenged on every one of you!"

Lennox rose from his chair.

"Is that all you have to say, Mr. Merchant? Yes? Well, permit me to say two things to you. In the first place, don't do anything so utterly futile as to try and avenge yourself upon me, and in the second place, good-evening!"

Somewhat to his surprise the angry patentee only gave him an ominous scowl, and left the room without another word.

"Dangerous man, that!" thought Lennox. "Those men with deep-set eyes are always fanatical when they are obsessed with an idea. Revenge himself on me! Why, the old gentleman would have been surprised if I had told him that it would be a convenience if he had shot me on the spot. If I'd had presence of mind enough I might have offered him the loan of a revolver. It would have saved me the trouble. It's funny, his idea about my making a huge fortune out of B. M. Co.'s shares."

He walked to his bed-room and found the revolver and box of cartridges that lay in a drawer of his dressing-table. Then he smiled to himself. "No," he said, "not to-night! I'll face it out to-morrow. It will be an amusement to bluff them on 'Change. I wonder what old Myers will think when he sees me as merry as a cricket. I should like the fellows to think that I took my gruelling like a sportsman. I'll have a jolly day. There's time enough before Friday."

The next morning he went to business as usual, and greeted all his friends in the cheeriest way. He even, much to that gentleman's astonishment, patted Myers

on the back, and gave him a special tip for a race that day, and he smiled as he saw the dealer's puzzled glance at him. He noticed that the men on his market looked at him curiously, and guessed that the rumor had passed round that he was caught short of B. M. Co. shares.

However, no one chaffed him on the subject. He gathered that all thought that the matter was too serious for that. So he joined merrily in the chaff and practical jokes that diversified business.

"At any rate," he thought, "they sha'n't say that I showed the white feather on my last day."

Not till lunch did anyone make any allusion to his difficulties. Then his old friend Denton insisted on their lurching together, and during the meal intimated that if Lennox were in need of a thousand pounds or so on settling day he had only to say the word to get it.

"A good sort, Denton," thought Lennox, and said in reply: "My dear fellow, if I needed the money there's no man I'd come to sooner than you, but I don't, Thanks, all the same."

"I'm jolly glad to hear it," cried the good-hearted Denton. "They were saying that you were caught short of B. M. Co. shares. You know what silly chatter passes round. Excuse me saying what I did, but we've always been pals, and if you were in a fix I wanted to do you a good turn. I've no patience with those fellows on the market who're always hinting things. I was uneasy all last night because someone gave me to understand, as I was going home, that you might soon be in Queer Street."

"Sorry if you've been worried, old man," replied Lennox. "I'm just as much obliged to you, though, as if I had been in need of it and you had lent it."

He reflected, as the genial dealer hurried away to avoid his thanks.

"It would only be a drop in the bucket, anyhow, and I'm not such a cur as to let a good friend in. Denton's got a wife and kids, too. He can't afford to lose a cool thousand."

He returned to business, and in Myers's hearing made an appointment with one man to golf on Saturday afternoon, and readily agreed to join a motoring party to Brighton on Sunday.

"That'll give Myers the headache to-night when he tries to understand it," he thought.

At last business was over, and he went back to his flat in the West End.

"I shall be dining out to-night, Simpson," he said to his man. "If you wish for the evening off, you may have it."

"Thank you, sir!" said Simpson, respectfully.

"By the way, how many years have you been with me?"

"Six, sir," replied Simpson.

"Well, I may give up this flat shortly, Simpson and I am not sure whether I shall need you then. In any case, whether I do or not, I am much obliged for what you have done for me. Here are five ten-pound notes, to show you that I have appreciated your services."

"I am sure that I am very grateful to you, sir," said the surprised servant.

"Not at all; the obligation is on my side, so please don't trouble to thank me. If you'll put my things out you can be off for the evening as soon as you like."

"Thank you very much, sir. I hope that you will be able to arrange that I shall stay in your service, sir."

Lennox paced his smoking room uneasily till he heard the door of the flat close, and knew that Simpson had gone out. Then he went to his dressing-table and got his revolver from the drawer. He loaded it carefully, and then went back to his smoking room.

"I've oceans of time," he thought. "I may as well have a last, comfortable pipe."

He sorted out his oldest favorite from the pipes strewn on the table and filled it.

"It's the only way out," he meditated, as he sat down to smoke. "I couldn't bear to be hammered on Friday. I could pay for the shares to be carried over till next settling-day, but what's the use? It'd only mean drawing out the agony. What a wind there's blowing to-night! East, too! I always hated East winds. Won't bother me to-morrow, anyhow."

The shout of the newsboys' "Extra Spechul!" came up to him from the street below.

"Confound their noise!" he murmured. "Can't I have a bit of peace here. If I've said it once, I've said it twenty times that I'll have double windows fitted to this flat to keep the noise out." Then recollecting himself, he smiled. "Perhaps it is a bit late for alterations now, but double windows would be a convenience to-night. They'd keep the sound of a revolver shot from annoying the neighbors."

At that moment the door opened and Simpson entered.

"Well, Simpson," he said casually, "what have you come back for?"

"I beg your pardon, sir, but I bought a 'special' in the street, and I thought it might interest you."

"I'm afraid not," replied Lennox.

"But I understood, sir, from that person who called yesterday that you were interested in the British Manufacturing Company. If I am mistaken, I beg your pardon, sir. But I thought that this might interest you."

Lennox took the paper the man handed him.

"No, sir, not under the Stock Exchange news. In the stop-press, sir."

And then Lennox read:

"The huge works of the British Manufacturing Company at Homerton were fired to-day by an incendiary in a dozen places. There is no hope of saving any portion of the works. The damage is estimated at more than a quarter of a million. The incendiary, who gives the name of Marchant, was arrested with a petrol bomb in his possession, and alleges as his motive that he had some grievance against the company. We understand that less than one-third of the loss is covered by insurance. In the Street the Company's shares have fallen to 3."

Lennox shrugged his shoulders.

"Not bad news, sir, I hope," said Simpson, anxiously.

"Not at all, Simpson. You may go out for your evening's amusement with a light heart. Don't waste any more of your time here."

Directly the man had left the room he unloaded the revolver.

"Phew!" he muttered, wiping his forehead. "What a narrow shave, and what a lucky revenge."

"Were you not near when I was assailed?"
"No; I was on my way to the station. You directed me to be there. Who assailed you?"
"An old fellow who called himself the town constable."
"You've been fooled; it was no town constable."
"Who could it have been?"
"That same mysterious devil who is on our track."
Ward meditated a moment as he wiped the blood streaming from his many scalp wounds, and finally said:
"By all that's strange and wonderful, it must be true."
"What is true?"
"I was on the track of the double, and that fellow must have been disguised."
Ward related all that had occurred as he had observed it while watching at the station, and Benson remarked:
"You are correct."

CHAPTER XXII.

"SOMETHING must be done, Benson."
"Yes, something must be done."
"What can we do?"
"There is but one thing to do."
"Well?"
"Get away with this mystery man."
"We can and we will."
"You mean, we will if we can."
"We must."
"If possible."
"I repeat, we must."
"How can we get away with him?"
"Lay a trap and walk him into it."
"You are a ready man. Arrange your plans; I will aid in carrying them out. But I'll tell you one thing: we have a bad man to deal with—one of the smartest men we were ever pitted against, and, as it looks, we are in a bad way, especially if—" Benson stopped short.
"Go on," said Ward.
"If Branton is really dead."
Ward did not explain in that direction. He merely said:
"We will be all right if we only dispose of this man."
"You forget the women."
"We can easily get rid of them."
"But to how many have they told their tale?"
"They have not had much to tell."
"I believe differently. You would have been all right if Vannoy had been hung, but—"
"Well, go on."
"Suppose Branton is alive?"
"You know he is dead. Vannoy killed him, that you know."
"Did he really kill him?"
"Certainly. Was not his death proved?"
"He may have secreted him."
"Was not the body found and identified?"
"Yes, by you."
"Benson, what are you saying; what is your game?"
"I have no game. Only I tell you things look bad, very bad. I do not believe Vannoy will be caught, and if he is, I do not believe he will be hung."
"Why not? He is sentenced."
"Yes; but this man who caned you a little while ago?"
"Within forty-eight hours he will be out of the way."
"Are you sure of that?"
"Yes, I am."
"If that is true, you will have a chance, otherwise it looks bad, very bad."
"Are you getting weak?"
"No; but it's a losing game you are playing, I fear. Suppose Branton should turn up?"
"He will never turn up."
"Then why don't you carry out your scheme?"
"I'd feel better were Vannoy out of the way. He might make trouble afterward."
"Are you dead sure this man of mystery is not Vannoy?"
"I am dead sure."
"We will return to our lodgings."
"But we're down on the double, you say?"
"Yes."
"And the man who downed you was talking with her—".
"Yes."
"She was disguised as a man?"
"Yes."
"Then you can make up your mind that there is a dead open and shut game against you. Some one is trailing."
"For what?"
"Facts."
"That is what you think?"
"Yes."
"Then you admit they have not got the facts yet?"
"It would so appear."
"They will never get them unless they get in with Vannoy."
"How do you know they are not in with Vannoy?"
"If they were they would have the facts."
"There is something in that, I will admit; but I tell you a great game is being played against you—a great game."
"And so it appears; but—"
The man stopped, and Benson, after waiting a moment, said:
"Go on."
"I am determined."
"Determination is a good thing; but these people are evidently determined also."

"Who can this be?"
"I have a suspicion."
"What is your suspicion?"
"I hardly dare tell you."
"Speak out."
"In my opinion the man who is working this game against you is—"
"Well, what is he?"
"In my opinion, a detective."
Ward started, and after a moment said:
"It can not be possible."
"I believe I am right."
"A detective who is a regular officer would not be arrayed against the law."
"This man is arrayed against you."
"Yes; but he can not be a detective."
"He is, as you will learn in the end."
"If what you say is true, this is very serious business for us."
"For you."
"But he can not be a detective."
"All right; keep thinking so. I have my opinion, all the same; and if it is a detective, your chances are better."
"Better?"
"Yes."
"How?"
"Detectives are on the make."
"Some of them."
"Mostly all of them."
"But there is no encouragement in that direction from the parties we are hunting down."
"You forget that they will have plenty of money if they beat and expose you."
"There is really something in that."
"Yes, a good deal."
"What would you advise me to do?"
"You have ready money?"
"Well?"
"Buy up the detective. You will never beat him. He is too smart for you, that is certain."
"I am not so sure of that."
"You have offered a large reward for the capture of Vannoy?"
"Yes."
"That officer can produce him."
"Then why don't he do so and claim the reward?"
"He may be playing for bigger stakes."
"The reward offered is big enough for any one."
"Then you do not approve of my proposition?"
"I will wait awhile and find out."
"Find out what?"
"Who this man really is."
"You may wait too long."
"If I am to buy him, I can do that any time."
"You may not be able to do it at all. There is just one chance that you may succeed."
"We will wait and see. He has had it all his own way. I will take a turn now on the winning side."
"You think you will win?"
"I will win."
"All right; I have advised to the best of my judgment. Now I will obey orders."

CHAPTER XXIII.

A LITTLE later Benson and Ward separated, and in the meantime, while they had been holding the conversation related, the detective was working a great shadow.

As recorded, after having knocked Ward down, he walked away. During the time he was engaged in the fracas he managed to observe the direction taken by the disguised woman, and he immediately started to follow. He had bid her to walk slowly, and had calculated that she would obey. But when he looked around for her she was nowhere in sight.

"Aha!" he murmured, "she has sought to give me the shake, eh? Well, we will see what fine detective work will accomplish now. I am right on the track of this mystery, and I do not mean to let the light fade out, that's all."

As intimated, the detective had observed the original direction taken by the disguised woman, and he had lost sight of her. When he started to recover the trail he determined to make an all-night job of it. He proceeded very slowly, and soon met a boy.

"Haloo, lad!" he said, "what are you doing out so late?"
The boy was of the saucy kind, and he answered:
"That's my business."
"Is it?"
"Yes."
"Good enough; but I know something you don't know."
"Do you?"
"I do."
"You're smart," came the saucy and irreverent answer.
"Well, you will find you are not so smart when I tell you something."
"If you have anything to tell me, out with it."
"Say, lad, do you know you will run into bad health?"
"Is that the news you had for me?"
"No; only it's very unhealthy to be as fresh as you are; you'll fade soon."
"Is that your news?"
"No; and I don't know as I will tell you the news, you are so young."
"You're quite a lad, aren't you? But, mister, I've no time to waste with you."

"Oh, you are in a hurry?"
"Yes, I am."
"Well, you just take things easy; fade down a little; don't keep so fresh; your fragrance is killing."
"Who are you, anyhow?"
"I told you I had news for you."
"Give me the news."
"Your mother doesn't know you're out."
"Bab! is that all you have to tell me?"
"No; I only gave you that gratuitously. You're in danger."
"I'm in danger?"
"Yes, you are."
"How?"
"Which way did you come?"
"I came across lots."
"You did?"
"I did."
"Well, yes, that's it; I knew I was right. That man you met is laying for you."
"The man I met is laying for me?" repeated the lad.
"Yes."
"You are 'way off now, mister."
"Am I?"
"Yes."
"How?"
"I did not meet a man."
"Yes, you did."
"No, I didn't. I met a woman. Ha! ha! there's where I've got you."
"Aha!" thought the detective, "I am on to it now. The lady shed her male disguise, and is retiring to her refuge as a woman. Good enough!"
"You can't give me that, sonny," said the detective, aloud.
"It was a man you met, and he is on your track."
"He is, eh?"
"Yes."
"Why is he on my track?"
"You get home as fast as you can, that's all, and don't let the man see you."
"I'm not afraid of any man; but the joke of it is I did not see a man."
"Are you giving it to me straight?"
"Yes, I am."
"Really, was it a woman you met?"
"Yes."
"What did she say to you?"
"Nothing; she tried to dodge me."
"Oh, you go long."
"Yes, she did."
"The woman tried to dodge you?"
"Yes, she did."
"Why did she wish to dodge you?"
"I reckon she knew her own business."
"I see, the woman was a friend of yours, you little scamp."
"No, she was not a friend of mine; I never saw her before."
"Dead true?"
"Yes, dead true."
"Where did you meet her?"
"Just on the edge of the woods."
"This side or the other?"
"The other."
"And you never saw her before?"
"No."
"Did you watch her?"
"Yes."
"Which way did she go?"
"Over toward the big woods."
"Are you acquainted around here?"
"I was born near here."
"Then you know the country?"
"Yes."
"You've been all through the big woods?"
"Yes, I have."
"Who lives in the nearest house?"
"No one."
"The house is deserted, eh?"
"I reckon you are a stranger around here."
"What makes you think I am a stranger?"
"If you were acquainted you'd know there was no house in the big woods."
"Then why was the lady going to the big woods?"
"I don't know; that's what gets me."
"Is it a short cut?"
"Yes, if she is a good swimmer; otherwise she would go round by the bridge."
"Isn't it strange a woman should be going to the big woods at night?"
"Yes."
"Why didn't you follow her?"
"I didn't want to get my head blown off."
"Who would blow your head off?"
"There's strangers lurking around in the woods."
"There are strangers there?"
"Yes."
"Who are they?"
"I told you they were strangers."
"Then you never saw the people?"
"No."
"Who has seen them besides you?"
"I don't know."
"How often have you seen them?"

"Twice."
"In the day-time or at night?"
"Once in the day-time and once at night."
"When did you see them last?"
"Say, mister, who are you, and what are you up to?"

CHAPTER XXIV.

The question came abruptly:
"You would like to know who I am?"
"Yes."
"I am a tramp."
"I thought so. Maybe you are the man I saw in the woods."
"You are pretty smart, sonny."
"You are the man I saw in the woods."
"I thought it was a woman you saw?"
"I saw a woman a few moments ago; but you are the man I saw the other night."
"Well, well! how bright you are! Now that you know who I am without telling you, please answer my question."
"I forgot your question."
"I asked you when you saw the man last."
"Oh, you know well enough you're the man."
The boy began to edge away. The detective meditated a moment, and then said:
"Lad, I am not the man you saw in the woods. I am on the track of that man."
"Is that true?"
"Yes."
"Who is the man?" demanded the lad.
"Well, I've got a suspicion."
"You've got a suspicion?"
"Yes."
"So have I," said the lad.
"What is your suspicion?"
"Tell me yours and I will tell you mine."
"I think the man dodging in the woods is Sheriff Allen."
"No, no. What would he be dodging around for?"
"You should know. You are a smart lad."
"I don't know."
"You don't?"
"I don't even suspect."
"He let a prisoner escape."
"That's so."
"He may be hunting around for his prisoner."
The lad remained silent.
"See how I reason it?" said the detective.
"I don't think I saw the sheriff."
"What leads you to say it was not the sheriff?"
"I know the sheriff by sight."
"Well?"
"I saw the man well enough to know it was not the sheriff."
"But the sheriff may be looking for the same man—the one you saw."
"Will you tell me who you are?"
"Say, lad, I know what you are after."
"What am I after?"
"The reward."
"Hush!" said the boy.
"Oh, it's all right."
"You are after the reward, too?" suggested the lad.
"Maybe we are both after the reward. Yes, that's right. And now I want you to go home."
"I think I've a right to stay; and if I want to, what is it your business?"
"This is no boy's work."
"Oh, that's what you think; but I know something, I do."
"But you can't fool me."
"I don't want to fool you."
"You don't know anything."
"Yes, I do."
"If you know anything, why don't you report it?"
"I will when I get ready."
"Not until you get ready, eh?"
"No."
"I'll tell you something, lad?"
"All right."
"You are in danger."
"I am in danger?"
"Yes."
"I guess not."
"Yes, you are."
"Well, I'll chance it."
"Don't be too smart."
"I know what I am about."
"So does the sheriff, and he is on to your game."
"The sheriff is on to my game?"
"Yes, and you are liable to arrest. The constable is looking for you at this moment."
"The constable is looking for me?"
"Yes."
"What does he want of me?"
"He will lock you up."
"Lock me up?"
"Yes."
"What for?"
"You've been conniving with the escaped man."
"It's a lie!"
"Tut, tut! don't talk so rash."
"Yes, it's a lie!"
"I came out here to look for you."

"How did you know I was here?"
"That's my business. But now come, tell me all you've seen in the woods and I'll give you a ten-dollar gold piece."
"You can't fool me."
"Ah, I see you are a bad one. I am on to your game. You did not meet a man, and you are trying to throw me off by saying it was a woman."
"No, it was a woman I met, I swear."
"And you know the woman?"
"No, I don't."
"You spoke to her?"
"I did not."
"You have seen her before?"
"No, I have not."
"You know why she went over toward the big woods?"
"No, I don't."
"Well, good-night, sonny; I am going over to the big woods, and if I meet any one, I'll shoot him. So, as it is a pretty dark night, and if you don't want to be shot, you had better go home and keep your mouth shut, or you may get in the lock-up."
"I'll go home when I get ready. You are a fraud. I am not afraid of you."
The detective made one step toward the lad, when, to his surprise, the boy whipped out a cocked revolver, and exclaimed:
"Go back! don't come near me!"
"Aha! you're a bad character, I see."
"You are a bad character."
"It's all right," said the detective, and he uttered a whistle.
The boy gave a start, and instinctively looked around. He suspected the whistle was a signal, and he feared some one might come up behind him. As he turned, the detective leaped suddenly forward, and quicker than a flash of light he took the cocked revolver away from the lad.
"Give me your pistol!" cried the lad.
"Oh! no. You are a bad character. I've got you now!"
"Give me my pistol."
"Not to-night, sonny; not to-night. You call at the jail for it to-morrow."
"Say, mister, will you tell me who you are?"
"I'll tell you something better. If you don't go home, I'll arrest you."
"No, you won't."
"Good enough! I've warned you; now I'll act."
The detective seized the lad and marched him a few steps, saying:
"In you go!"
The lad's nerve deserted him, and he cried out:
"Let me go! I'll tell all I know!"

CHAPTER XXV.

"No; you have had your chance. I've been on the lay for you. I am convinced you have been in company with criminals."
"No, no, I have not. I will tell all I know."
"All right; tell me all you know, and I will consider your case."
"There is a large reward offered for the capture of the man who escaped from jail?"
"Yes."
"I wanted to win that reward."
"Go on."
"I had a suspicion that the prisoner was hiding in the woods."
"Go on."
"I've been watching in the woods, and I've seen a man there."
"Did you ever see the woman before?"
"No."
"Did you have a good look at the man?"
"No."
"Did you ever see the prisoner?"
"Yes, once; in court during his trial."
"Did the man you saw in the woods look like the prisoner?"
"No."
"Who did he look like?"
"It was a man; but I thought he might be in disguise."
"What do you know about disguises?"
"I know all about disguises. I've read about men going under disguises."
"Did you see the man to-night?"
"No."
"Did you ever follow him and learn where he went?"
"I did follow him once, but I did not learn where he went."
"How is that?"
"He vanished as though he had been suddenly wiped out."
"Where did this occur?"
"On the bank of the river."
"What part of the river?"
"Where the bank runs up into quite a high sandy bluff."
"He suddenly disappeared about there?"
"Yes."
"Did he swim the river?"
"No need. He could have waded across. The river is only high after a heavy rain; then it becomes a torrent."
"Did you ever see more than one man?"
"No."
"And you never met a woman around here until to-night?"
"No."
"Why didn't you follow the woman?"
"I am not on the look-out for a woman."
"The man disappeared just where the bank of the river is highest?"
"Yes."

"And in what direction is the highest part of the river from where you stand now?"

"It is a straight line from here."
"And you were after the reward?"
"Yes."
"Was any one in with you on this hunt?"
"No."
"You were going it alone?"
"Yes."
"Did you ever mention to any one what you had seen?"
"No."
"Well, young fellow, your story appears to be straight. I will let you go; but I do not wish to catch you around here again."
"I have a right to win the reward if I can."
"You go home and keep quiet, and maybe you will get a reward. Go, now."

The detective released the lad, and he moved rapidly away. Henry Brock stood a little while and considered all that he had heard, and he reasoned out a conclusion, and his conclusion was that he was pretty close on the hiding-place of the escaped man. He walked on toward the big woods, as the lad had termed the stretch of forest which bordered the river.

It was a pretty big woods for the section of country where it was located, and seemed bigger because a great swamp lay on one side—a great stretch of marsh-land, which the people said had never been penetrated by any human being.

Having reached the edge of the woods, he then commenced to move very cautiously. Indeed, he was always a cautious man, always advanced slowly and measured his way, and soon he became aware that there was some one moving in the woods. He leaped behind a tree, and a little later clearly distinguished the outlines of a man's figure, and he also recognized that it was not the form of the disguised woman. It was the figure of a person much larger than the party he had talked with at the station.

The detective was just on the edge of the woods. He saw the man steal out to the open ground. He followed. He saw the strangely acting individual walk some distance out in the open space beyond the woods. He beheld him look around in the most careful manner, and after a time saw him return under the shadow of the trees.

Having considered the purpose of the man's movements, he decided that he was making a reconnaissance, seeking to learn if any one was in the vicinity, and our hero determined that his own presence fortunately had not been discovered.

After some little time the stranger moved through the woods. Henry followed. He kept a reasonable distance behind, but sought to keep the man in sight, and so he followed for an eighth of a mile, when the man suddenly disappeared—disappeared as described by the lad, and our hero remembered that the boy had said the man had disappeared at the bluff on the river.

Henry moved forward, going very slowly and carefully, like an Indian following a trail. He soon reached the river-bank, and found himself standing on a high bluff overlooking the river.

It was a clear night. The stream at the time was not over a hundred feet in width, but its real bed was five or six hundred feet wide.

Again the detectives stood and considered. He muttered:

"This is about the spot where the man disappeared. He may have gone down over the bank. If he did, I will find the imprint of his feet; if he did not, he—well, he disappeared, that's all; and this time he is not dropping out of sight of a boy, that's all."

The detective walked in a lateral direction, and descended to the river-bed to a point directly opposite to where he had stood while meditating and soliloquizing. He drew from his pocket a mask lantern. He flashed the light around in every direction, and finally muttered:

"The man did not cross the river."

CHAPTER XXVI.

AGAIN the detective meditated. He had a suspicion; indeed, he was certain that some one was in hiding very near to where he stood at that moment, and although not visibly excited, inwardly he was just a little perturbed, as he had excellent reasons for believing that the party in hiding was Vannoy.

Our readers may ask why he hesitated. We will explain why he hesitated. Vannoy was under sentence of death. If he discovered the man, it would be his duty to hand him over to the authorities, and it was almost certain that he would be executed. There were no additional absolute proofs of his innocence. The law is inexorable. The man had been fairly tried, convicted, and sentenced, and the death-sentence could only be stayed by the production of absolute proof. The mere belief of the detective in his innocence, unsupported by evidence, would not amount to anything.

Henry thought he could put his hand on the man, and yet hesitated to do so. He desired first to obtain at least probable testimony that would permit of an appeal to the governor for a postponement of the day of execution. No man knew better than our hero the difficulties in the way of such a movement. He considered long and well, and at length determined to merely note the surrounding bearings and then go away.

He started to ascend the face of the cliff. It was a difficult climb, and he had almost reached the top, when, in extending forward his hand, he grasped a little tuft of bush which yielded, and he pulled it away, when a little opening was disclosed. The detective crawled up until his head was on a line with the opening, and as he hung there meditating, he encountered a most thrilling surprise. He overheard noises actually coming, as it seemed, from the very bowels of the earth.

Henry's heart beat fast as he braced himself and put his ear to the little opening. Then he distinctly heard voices, and the open-

ing, acting as the mouth-piece of a pneumatic tube, he was able to distinguish the words spoken. Two people were talking. One voice was that of a woman, the second he discerned was the voice of a man, and he heard words that caused him to listen with intense interest.

The whole situation was an exciting and novel one. It was the most singular and remarkable adventure, under the circumstances, he had ever encountered. He heard a female voice say:

"It is not safe for us to remain here any longer."

Then followed an interval ere the male voice answered:

"I jes' don't agree with you, Miss Alice."

"Great Scott!" was the detective's mental ejaculation; and he muttered: "It's negro in there with the girl, and they are hidden in a cave. Well, well! I have run down Vannoy of a certainty; and now, what shall I do? My duty says, follow it up; discretion says, wait. If I wait, I must go away, and what—Hark! these people have become alarmed, and they contemplate going away."

"I have not told you all, Jake," the detective heard the female say.

"Go on, Miss Alice, and tell me all."

"There is some one on our track."

"Ne, no, Miss Alice; not on our track."

"Yes, on our track."

"Well, suppose dey is, dey can't harm us. We ain't done no wrong."

"That is true; but we may be arrested."

"Arrested, Miss Alice?"

"Yes."

"Who can arrest us?"

"The attorney of the county."

"How can he arrest us, Miss Alice? We ain't done nuffin, I tell yer."

"But he can arrest us as suspicious characters."

"We ain't done nuffin suspicious."

"It is suspicious our living here in this cave."

"You don't live here, Miss Alice."

"But I come here to see you."

"Dat am so; but you needn't come no more."

"You met some one in the woods?"

"Dat were only a boy."

"That boy followed you?"

"Yes; but I jes' disappeared on him."

"He may report how you disappeared."

"S'pose he does, Miss Alice?"

"Others will start out on your track."

"S'pose dey do, Miss Alice?"

"They may ferret you out."

"S'pose dey do, Miss Alice?"

"It will be a very suspicious circumstance, I reckon."

"Dat's all, Miss Alice. Dey can't do nuffin but suspect."

"We can't tell, Jake."

"Can't tell what, miss?"

"How closely we may have been followed."

"But s'pose dey find me here, eh? I will jes' say I live here, dat am all; and what kin dey do, eh?"

"We do not know how much they may have learned."

"About what, Miss Alice?"

"About me. Suppose I have been tracked to this place?"

"Well, suppose dat am true? Yer habn't done nuffin."

"No; but it will interfere with my plans."

"What are your plans, Miss Alice?"

"To find a dead man alive."

"Golly! I see you stick to that idea."

"Yes, I do."

"I tell yer, Miss Alice, dat ar Branton am a dead man."

"I do not believe it; and if we can find him, there will be no trouble. Then Arthur can come forth from his hiding-place, and we can prove the conspiracy against Ward."

"I'se got an idea, Miss Alice."

"What is your idea?"

"I'se hardly able ter tell you."

"Yes, tell me."

"It am a strange notion."

"Never mind; I'd like to hear your strange notion."

"You t'ink Branton am an honest man?"

"Yea."

"Den dere am no use my tellin' yer my s'picion, Miss Alice."

"Yes, tell me your suspicion."

"And yer won't be mad?"

"No."

"Den, if Branton am alive, he am in der conspiracy; dat's all."

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE female made no answer to the negro's statement, and our hero drew his own conclusions.

He was in quite a dilemma. He hardly knew what to do under all the circumstances. He feared one disclosure, and that same disclosure would place him in an embarrassing position.

"Jake, it is not safe for you to remain here."

"Yes, it am, miss."

"I tell you some one is on our track. There is a very shrewd man who has identified me. He pretends to be a friend, but I know he is an enemy."

"Never mind. You hab not done nuffin. No one can interfere wid you."

"You forget, Jake."

"What am it dat I forget, Miss Alice?"

"Ward has identified me."

"Am yer shuah ob dat?"

"Yes, I am."

"Den dat am bad. He may get up some scheme on you."

"He may do worse."

"Kill you, Miss Alice?"

"Yes. He is getting desperate enough to do that."

"Den dar am but one t'ing to do."

"And what is that?"

"You go away, go hide yerself, and leab de search to dis yere chile. I'se gettin' on to de facts; yes, I is."

"I am afraid they will find you."

"Let 'em. Dey can't do nuffin."

"If they find you here, they will claim that you are a suspicious character, and they will put you in jail."

"Den I'se gwine ter git out ob jail, dat am all."

"But you can not carry on the search."

"I'se got an idea. We are wastin' time aroun' here, anyhow, Miss Alice. Now, ef yer could only come in collusion wid Mr. Arthur."

Again the lady made no answer, and the detective decided that she had been in collusion, as the negro termed it, with Vannoy, but had not given Jake her whole confidence.

"Jake, I tell you it will be bad for us if you are discovered, and it will be worse if Ward traile me down to my abiding-place."

"Take my advice, Miss Alice—go away and leab it all ter me."

Henry concluded it would be wise for him to just lay low. He fell to the fact that the girl was only paying a visit to the negro, and that ere daylight she would probably return to her abiding-place, and upon her return would depend his opportunity. He was also satisfied that Vannoy was not in the underground apartment.

There followed a few moments' silence, and then the female said:

"We will decide to go away, Jake."

"What! you go and I go?"

"Yes."

"No, no, Miss Alice."

"Why are you so determined to stay around here?"

"Cause I'se on ter somet'ing."

"What are you on to, Jake?"

"Can't tell yet now, Miss Alice; but I'se got an idea, and when I'se satisfied dat I am right, den I'll tell yer all about it."

"When will you decide?"

"By ter-morrow night, Miss Alice, I'se gwine ter know something, dat am shuah."

"In the meantime you may be discovered."

"I tell yer, Miss Alice, yer go away for a week, and leab me heal. Dey are on to you, so you say, but dey is not on ter me, and I don't mean dat dey shall be."

"We can not tell, Jake. They may be close on our track, may know more than we dream, and they may only be giving us a little rope. How is it that Ward was at the depot? How is it that the stranger knew so much of my business?"

"Mebbe dat strangers were a frien', Miss Alice?"

"No; it was one of Ward's tricks. He is seeking to entrap me. He thinks I know the whereabouts of Arthur, and he is surely trailing every step."

"Den he must know your refuge-place already, Miss Alice."

"I am afraid he does; and he may abduct me at any moment."

"Den he am a dead man, dat's all."

"No, no, Jake; there must be no killing."

"Dat am all right; but I'se bound ter do it in self-defense. Yes, Miss Alice, if he takes you off, it am self-defense. Now I've got a proposition ter make."

"Well?"

"I want ter see dat ar man who met yer at de depot."

"Why do you wish to see him?"

"I'se gwine ter fool him, dat's all."

"How can you fool him?"

"I'se got a way to do it."

"What is your way?"

"Can't tell yer now; but I'se boun' to find out one t'ing."

"Find out what?"

"Wedder he be yer frien' or yer foe."

"You will make a mistake."

"I will, eh?"

"Yes."

"How?"

"You will be caught; and then what will I do?"

"Look yere, Miss Alice, I've got an idea."

"What is your idea?"

"Please don't make me tell yer now, but I'se a good idea. We am all right. One t'ing we know—dat Arthur am safe for de present, eh? and we's got plenty ob time."

"There are reasons, Jake, that I can not explain to you why I feel it will be fatal if either one of us is captured. If they put us in jail, we will be helpless. This man Ward has money. He has all the advantage; and if he once gets us, or either of us, in his possession, it will be very bad for Arthur."

"But we ain't gwine ter let him ketch us."

"I tell you they are close on our track. I was followed to-night, and I met that prowling boy. We are being hemmed in on every side."

"I jes' want one or two days more, Miss Alice. I'se been on de track ob dat man Ward, and I'se got a good scheme—yes, I hab a very good scheme."

"What is your scheme, Jake?"

"I ain't a-gwine ter tell you now, Miss Alice; but I want yer to take de train and go away from here. Leab me aroun' for a few days, and den I'se gwine ter work dat ar scheme; and it am a good one."

"Jake, I must go now; it's getting toward morning. I will risk to-morrow, and then we will decide."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

"BETTER go away, Miss Alice, and leab it all ter me."

"I will talk it over to-morrow, Jake; and now peep out and see if the road is clear; I must go."

"I'se going wid yer, Miss Alice."

"No, I do not need your company."

"Arter what yer hab tolle me, I ain't gwine ter trust you alone. No, miss. I'se gwine wid yer."

"I am going alone, Jake. Just see if the road is clear."

Henry glanced round quickly to learn if he was safe from observation. He determined to lay low, and a moment later he saw the form of the negro. He had failed to discover how Jake had made his exit from the underground chamber, and he still lay low and watched, and a few moments later heard voices on the surface near by.

"Yer had better let me go wid yer, Miss Alice."

"No, I will go alone."

The woman, Alice, had come up from the cave, and still the detective had failed to observe her mode of doing so, and a little later he heard the words:

"Good-night; I will see you to-morrow."

Henry quietly moved along under the bank. He was determined to trail the girl to her home. And after gaining a point some distance from the underground chamber, he started to move rapidly in a parallel direction to that taken, as he supposed, by the girl. He had gone but a few steps, however, when suddenly he felt himself grasped in a powerful pair of arms.

The detective was taken at a disadvantage, and although his appearance did not denote it, he was a very powerful man, an accomplished athlete. A terrific struggle followed, and not a word had been spoken.

As intimated, the detective had been taken at a disadvantage, and after a moment's struggle he surrendered, stopped the futile combat, and permitted himself to be thrown to the ground, and then his antagonist laughed, and exclaimed:

"I gen' I'se got yer!"

As he spoke, Jake, believing he had an absolute victory, fell off his guard, and the next minute he was thrown into the air over the detective's head, and a second later our hero had him pinned to the ground.

Henry Brock's seeming surrender was only a feint. He did not wish to injure the negro. He had evidence that Jake was a good, loyal fellow, and to overcome the latter's advantage in any other way than the one he had adopted, he would have been compelled to do the good fellow some harm.

Henry Brock was more anxious to follow the girl Alice than hold Jake, and he said:

"Well, old man, you haven't got me good, after all."

"I weren't lookin'. Yer took me nappin'."

"Did It?"

"Yes, yer did."

Henry was compelled to think quickly, and after just half a minute, he said:

"I am going to let you go free. If you follow me, I'll shoot you in your tracks."

Jake made no answer, and the detective rose to his feet, letting the negro go free, when, like a flash, Jake sprung upon him again. In this second struggle the negro did not have the advantage. He was a powerful fellow, as stated, but no match for a skilled and powerful detective.

The second struggle was a short one, for Henry throttled his man; and when he let him fall to the ground, Jake was too exhausted to rise. He was panting for breath; he was completely exhausted.

Henry ran off in pursuit of the girl; but again delay proved fatal to his purpose. He missed her. He tried to strike the trail, but in the darkness was unsuccessful.

"Hang that darky!" he muttered. "I am beat again. The girl has escaped me."

The detective spent some time hunting for the trail, and was finally compelled to give it up; and then he determined to return and interview Jake.

He reached the vicinity of the place where the combat had taken place just as the negro partially recovered. Jake rose to his feet, and he heard the faithful fellow mutter:

"Golly! it were de debil hisself, shuah! He jes' handled me like I were a chile! Yes, he did."

Our hero did not know of the secret entrance to the underground chamber where Jake burrowed, and he determined to lay low, watch his man, and learn.

Jake, meantime, started to look around; then he commenced to circle over a given area; and the detective discerned that, Indian-like, he was circling for a trail.

It was almost daylight when Jake, with a disappointed grunt, gave up the search.

Henry had not followed. On the contrary, he had taken up a position near the spot where the cave was located. He expected that, as the day dawned, the negro would return, and his calculations proved correct. In due time Jake came stealing back.

Henry lay low from a safe place, and he made a most curious discovery.

The negro went to a big tree, opened a part of the trunk, as though it had been a regular door, and disappeared in the big tree-trunk; and our hero had the secret of the underground chamber.

A few moments he waited, and then advanced to the tree. It took some time for him to get posted as to the real manner in which the tree was fixed, but finally he succeeded. He found it necessary to bore through the bark door, and then he managed to slide a bolt. It took him over an hour. He succeeded, however, as stated, and the opening to the den below was exposed.

It became necessary for Henry to go very slow. He closed and bolted the tree door after him, and then meditated.

He was well aware that the negro would be in a desperate mood, and would probably be armed, and, under all the circumstances, feel at liberty to shoot. Henry did not desire to be shot like a wood-chuck penetrating the wrong burrow.

He would be compelled to let himself down at least seven feet. This he discovered by flashing the light of his mask-lantern down through the opening.

After a little he did let himself down, and then he lay still and listened. Jake would have him at a disadvantage, and our hero did not wish to be thus dropped out.

CHAPTER XXIX.

As intimated, the detective lay low and listened, and soon a sound fell upon his ear that was really reassuring under all the circumstances. He heard as distinct a snore as ever was breathed through human nostrils.

"Poor Jake!" he muttered. "The fellow has gone to sleep. He is at my mercy. Now let me go slow."

The detective drew his revolver, cocked it, and, face forward, crawled down toward the chamber.

All would have been right, but the wily Jake had set a trap. Henry struck against a string; the string pulled over a pot; there followed a crash, and Jake was on his feet.

The darky seized a double-barreled gun, and the chances were all against the detective, had he not been as quick as it is possible for a human being to be.

Bang! spoke forth his revolver, and the gun fell from Jake's grasp.

One instant later, and our hero would have been a dead man.

The poor negro believed he was shooting in self-defense. He was not of a murderous mind; but, with limited reasoning powers, he believed his own life was in danger.

Henry sprung into the chamber and grappled his man. All his movements were lightning-like in their quickness. He downed Jake and had the handcuffs on him, and the poor fellow stared, powerless and helpless.

"Well, Jake, I'se got yer."

The detective in a joking and jubilant mood imitated the negro's dialect.

"Yes yer hab got me. What am yer gwine ter do?"

"I am your friend, Jake."

"You is my friend?"

"Yes."

"No; you am not de frien' of dis yere chile."

"Yes, I is."

"No, sah, yer can't come no sich gum games on dis yere chile; but yer hab fooled yersel'."

"I'se fooled myself, eh?"

"Yes, yer hab."

"How?"

"Well, it ain't gwine ter do yer no good a-capturing dis yere chile."

"I don't want to capture you, Jake."

"Yer don't?"

"No."

"Den what am yer doin' here, dat's what I'se askin' yer?"

"I am here as your friend."

"Oh, go 'long."

"That is true."

"Yer go 'long."

"I am your friend."

"You is, eh?"

"Yes."

"Well, lend us five dollars, will yer?"

"Certainly."

"Yer will?"

"Yes, I will."

"Yer go 'long."

"Jake, I am really your friend."

"Den what is you got dese yere things for?"

"Because you were going to down me."

"Dat am de trufe."

"I could have downed you."

"Mebbe dat am de trufe; but what yer want? Why are yer aroun' here?"

"I want to talk to you."

"Am dat all?"

"Yes."

"When'yer am done talking what are yer gwine to do?"

"That depends."

"Oh, that depends, eh?"

"Yes."

"Go ahead, get in yer talking."

"You are a friend of Miss Alice?"

A startled look came to the negro's face, but in an instant he said:

"I ges yer am mad."

"Mad?"

"Yes—off yer kerbase. Mister, I don't know no Miss Alice."

"Yes, you do, Jake."

"No, sah."

"You are her friend."

"Yer hab lost yer senses, mister. Yer am away off."

"You are her friend, and I am her friend."

"Oh, yes, yer are!"

"I am."

"Well, dat am yer cwn business ef yer are a friend of some Miss Alice: but I jcn't know any Miss Alice."

"Then who was the lady who was down here in this cave with you less than two hours ago?"
The darky became greatly agitated.
"Dar warn't no lady down yere."
"Yes, there was; Miss Alice was down here."
"I'se got nuffin more to say, sah. Yer know it all; no use talkin' to you."
"Jake, I tell you I am the lady's friend."
"Am dat really so?"
"Yes."
"Den go and tell de lady I don't know who yer a-talkin' about."
"I am a friend of Arthur Vannoy."
"Are yer?"
"Yes."
"Who am Arthur Vannoy, mister?"
"Jake, you are awful ignorant."
"Yes, I is."
"But it won't do."
"Go on, sah, I'se nuffin more to say"
"I want to help Miss Alice."
"Go and help her; who's interferin'?"
"I want your aid."
"Yer do?"
"Yes."
"Golly! yer am a funny fellow. Yes, yer are, mister."
"You are a good fellow, Jake."
"T'ank yer—t'ank yer, sah."
"I heard you talking with Miss Alice."
"Did yer?"
"And when I started to follow her you assailed me."
"Did I?"
"Can't you see now that I know what I am talking about?"
"Yer am a good talker."
"After you came to yourself you spied around a bit and then came here; I was laying for you."
"Go on, sah."
"If I meant any harm to you I could kill you."
"Dat am true."
"If I wanted to arrest you I could carry you along with me."
"I ges dat am true."
"Then you must know that I am your friend, or the friend of Miss Alice?"
"I don't know nuffin."
"You are doing wrong, Jake."
"Is I?"
"Sure."
"How am dat?"
"You can do Miss Alice a service."
"Can I?"
"Yes."
"How?"
"By owning up to me."
"By owning up to you?"
"Yes."
"What do you want me to own up?"
"I want to see Miss Alice."
"Well, sir, yer am pretty smart. Go find her, dat's all."

CHAPTER XXX.

THE detective sat a moment and studied the face of the negro, after having received the answer recorded at the close of our preceding chapter.

"Jake, you are making a mistake."
"Is I?"
"Yes."
"Can't help it."
"You are at my mercy."
"See here, mister, yer might burn dis yere chile at de stake. Yer ain't gwine ter get nuffin out of me."
"Then you are really injurin' the cause of your friends."
"Dat am all right. I'se dar all de same. Yer can't fool dis yere chile."
"I've no intention of fooling you, Jake."
"Dat am all right."
"And you will give me no information?"
"No, sah; I've got nuffin ter say."
"All right; there is but one thing for me to do."
"Jes' do it, mister, jes' do it; don't mind me."
"You are a bad fellow."
"Yes, I is—yes, I is."
"The world can spare you."
"Yes, it kin—yes, it kin."
"If I hang you right here, I will save the county a big expense."
"Yes, yer will—yes, yer will."
"Have you any word to leave?"
"No, sah."
"Do you understand?"
"Yes, I does."
"What do you understand?"
"Yer a-gwine ter gib me a skeer, I reckon."
"Worse than that."
"Am dat so?"
"I am going to end your career of crime right here."
"Is yer?"
"I am."
"Ge ahead, mister—go ahead."
The detective found a rope lying near. He made a slip-noose, and holding it up before the negro, asked:

"Do you know what that is?"
"Ges I do; yes, sah, ges I do."
"What is it?"
"It am a hangman's noose."
"Then you know what a hangman's noose is?"
"Yes, I do."
"And you are prepared to hang rather than give me any information?"
"Yes, I is."
"Don't think I mean this as a 'skeer,' as you call it."
"Dat is all right."
"Prepare yourself."
"I is prepared, sah."
"To die?"
"Yes, sah."
Henry threw the noose over the darky's head. The poor fellow did not flinch for a cent.
"One! Jake."
"All right, sah."
"Two! Jake."
"All right, sah."
"You are still obstinate?"
"I is."
The detective made a movement as though about to pronounce the word "three," when suddenly there came a surprised look to his face, and he observed a similar expression pass over Jake's face.
"Some one is near, Jake."
"Yes, sah."
The detective had overhead voices, and he heard them quite plainly.
"What does it mean, Jake?"
"Don't know, sah."
"Your hiding place has been discovered."
"I ges so, sah."
"Whoever it is, they mean harm to you."
"Ges yer are right."
"You are not looking for friends?"
"No, sah."
"Jake, I am going to prove myself your friend."
There came an incredulous look upon the negro's face.
"I will prove myself your friend, Jake."
"All right, sah."
"You shall aid me."
"All right, sah."
"These people have trailed you down."
"It looks so, sah."
"That boy is at the bottom of it."
"What boy, sah?"
"The one you have seen hovering around here in the woods."
"Ges yer are right, sah."
"They mean to take you prisoner."
"Won't do 'em any good, sah."
"But you must not be taken."
"It am easy 'nough."
"How?"
"Here I is wid dese yere irons on me."
"I will take those off."
"Good 'nough."
"I am going to protect you."
"Good 'nough."
"I will not let you be taken."
"Yer am bery kind, sah."
"I mean it."
The detective removed the irons, and said:
"You shall not be made prisoner."
"All right, sah."
"No one must be harmed."
"I see, sah."
"We can scare them off, or, better—"
"All right, sah."
"Is there a place for you to hide?"
"Yes, sah."
"Where?"
"We bofe kin get out ob der way, sah."
"No; I will meet them."
"Ges yer all ready, sah."
"What do you mean?"
"Ter fool dis yere chile."
"What do you mean, I say?"
"Dey is yer friens; yes, dey is."
"No, Jake, I am your friend; you hide, and I will receive these visitors."
All the time while the detective was talking, very suggestive sounds had been heard.
"Get to your hiding-place, Jake, and listen."
Jake discovered an opening, and crawled into it, and a few moments later a voice called down through the opening:
"Come out here!"
The detective, imitating the negro's mode of speech, answered:
"I can't cum, sah."
"If you don't come out, we will smoke you out."
"I can't cum, sah."
Henry heard the man say:
"We will smoke him out."
A second voice suggested:
"That won't do. Suppose the white man is there?"
"What shall we do?"
"Go down and take him prisoner."
"He may fight."
Here followed a moment's silence, when one of the party said:
"We will send the boy down."

CHAPTER XXXI

THE detective was prepared for any movement they might make. He overheard considerable discussion, and a little later he saw the head and shoulders, not of a boy, but a man, had ventured down. The intruder saw the detective. The latter and the daring investigator faced each other. Henry did not make any demonstration, and the information was sent above:

"It's all right; come down."

A moment or two passed, and a second man let himself down, and soon the two men were actually in the cave, and there sat the detective gazing at them as cool as a cucumber. Some little time passed, when one of the men said:

"We've got you."

Henry laughed, and answered:

"Oh, no; I've got you."

"Got us?"

"Yes."

"You are our prisoner."

"Am I?"

"Will you surrender?"

"No."

It was a strange and, in some respects, a ludicrous scene.

"We've run you down."

"Run me down, eh?"

"Here we are."

"Yes, and you are going to stay here."

"Stay here?"

"Yes; you have walked right into a trap. I've got you where I want you. I've been waiting for you."

The two men looked into each other's faces, and then suddenly one of them drew a revolver. It was knocked from his grasp so quickly the man was stunned with surprise, and the next instant both men were downed, and while they lay partially helpless, the detective bound their hands and feet.

"I've got you now," he said.

The men were both silent.

"I've trapped you," said Henry.

The men still maintained silence.

"I've been on the lay for you," continued our hero; and he added: "Now, you fellows, confess."

The men were silent.

"Will you confess?"

"Confess what?" at length one of them ventured to inquire.

"Confess you are murderers and assassins."

"We are seeking a murderer and assassin."

"Eh?"

"We are seeking a murderer and assassin."

Henry appeared to be incredulous, and he asked:

"Is what you tell me the truth?"

"It is."

"Then there is some mistake here."

"Mistake?"

"Yes."

"How?"

"I am employed by Mr. Selleck to hunt down an escaped prisoner. Mr. Selleck did not tell me of any other men engaged officially in the search. Is your party on this lay?"

"Yes."

"Good enough! I will release you, and we will hold a consultation."

The detective released the two men, and all hands, at his suggestion, ascended to the surface.

There were three other men besides the boy. Ward was not with the party. Our hero took in the situation. The men were volunteer searchers—fellows who were after the reward. He discovered that the boy had run down the secret of the cave, had given information, and the whole party had come out to make a capture. Henry said:

"You men have spoiled the whole business."

"How?"

"I was lying in there waiting for the occupant of the cave to show up; now you have scared him off."

"We did not know any one was around. We got information of this cave, and believed we would capture the escaped man."

"You must get away as soon as you can. Come around here to-night, and if we make a capture, we will all share in the reward. But by hanging around here in a body you will scare the fellow off."

"Are we right? Have we run him down?"

"Can't tell yet. But get away as soon as you can, and don't tell any one you were here."

The men were reluctant to comply with the detective's advice, and finally he showed them his shield, and said:

"If you do not go, I will arrest every one of you!"

Seeing the shield, the men became more resistant, and one of them said:

"This fellow wants to beat us out of the reward. Our man is down in that cave. Let's bring him up and deliver him over to the authorities."

"I tell you men to clear out," said Henry.

"We won't go and leave the prisoner to you. We discovered him, and we are entitled to the reward."

"Once more, will you go?"

"No, we won't."

Henry suddenly drew his club and set to work, and the way the fellows scattered was a caution. They ran like deers, and he chased them until the men were all beyond the woods and far away. The detective returned to the cave. He found Jake on the surface.

"You must get away from here, Jake."

"Yes, sah; I takes it all in."

"You are satisfied now I am your friend?"

"Yes, sah."

"Will you take me to the young lady? I must see her at once."

"I'se gwine ter do it, sah."

"Is there anything down in the cave which will serve as a leader to any one?"

"No, sah."

"You are sure of that?"

"Yes, sah."

"Those fellows will return; the cave will be searched."

"Yes, sah."

"You are sure they will find nothing to reward them for their search?"

"Yes, sah."

"Where is Vannoy?"

"I don't know, sah."

"Are you telling me the truth?"

"Yes, I is, sah."

"And you will take me to the young lady?"

"Yes, sah—yes, sah."

"When?"

"Next week, sah—yes, next week."

CHAPTER XXXII.

HENRY saw that the negro did not mean to take any chances, so he led him away across the river in a direction opposite to where the cave was located, and then remarked:

"Jake, you believe in me?"

"Ges I do, sah."

"I am going to give you some advice."

"All right, sah."

"You are sure there is nothing in the cave?"

"Nuffin, sah."

"If they go through the cave they can't find anything that will give them a lead?"

"Nuffin, sah."

"Is there anything of value to you?"

"Nuffin, sah."

"You can afford to lose whatever is there?"

"Yes, sah."

"Is your person known?"

"I'se no idea, sah, dat I is known."

"All right; we will separate. But I must see you to-night."

"Whar, sah?"

"Where is there a good place for us to meet?"

"Anywhar, sah."

"Here?"

"Yes, sah."

"Can you mark this place?"

"Yes, sah."

"All right; we will meet here. Have you any money?"

"No, sah."

"How will you get food?"

"I'se all right, sah."

The detective saw that Jake was only anxious to get away.

"Very well, Jake; you meet me here to-night at twelve o'clock."

"Yes, sah."

"You will be on hand?"

"Yes, sah."

"I can depend upon you?"

"Yes, sah."

"Keep out of sight."

"Yes, sah."

"Well, good-morning, Jake."

"Good-morning, sah."

The detective started to recross the river. He did so, and once fully out of sight, he worked a transform, and muttered:

"Now, Jake, you are pretty cute; but what you would not give me willingly, you will give me *nolens volens*."

As stated, the detective worked a complete transform. He then proceeded along the river-bank. He had good reason to believe that Jake would cross to the same tide. He had good calculation for his conclusion, and it was not long before his conclusion was verified. He came to a place where he plainly discerned that Jake had crossed. He took up the trail, moved forward at a quick pace, and in due time came to the open road, and there, proceeding along at a leisurely gait, was the negro. A smile overspread the detective's face. He realized that his further calculations were about to be realized, and he muttered:

"All right, Jake, you are a cute fellow, but you are walking into a trap."

The negro proceeded for fully a mile along the road, then he started to go through a lane. It was in a lonely part of the country; there was not a house in sight; but soon after following the negro for about a mile and a half after he had turned into the lane, the detective arrived in sight of a house, and he muttered:

"It's all right, and just as I calculated."

Jake did not advance straight to the house. He fell into tactics more like an Indian. He crawled forward stealthily, and when pretty near, commenced imitating a bird, and in a few moments our hero beheld a sight that amused him. Alice appeared on the porch of the house. She listened, and then made a signal, and Jake stole away under a clump of trees. Fortune favored our hero. He crept along under a hedge in the channel of a narrow creek, and secured a position close to where the girl met Jake, and he arrived in time to overhear the very first words of the negro.

"I'se here, Miss Alice."

"What has happened, Jake?"

"Oh, golly! Miss Alice, ebery'ting has happened."

The girl turned very pale as she said:

"Tell me quick, Jake."

"Can't tell yer quick, Miss Alice. I'se got ter take my time, dar am so much ter tell."

"Has Arthur been found?"

"No, miss, not yet, as I know; but I'se been found."

"You have been found?"

"Yes."

"And you escaped?"

"Yes, I'se 'scaped."

"Tell me all about it."

"You remember when you went away last night?"

"Yes."

"Well, I jes' come out ter watch ter see dat dar wer'n't no one aroun'."

"Yes."

"I found dat dar wer' some one aroun', an' I jes' went 'fo' him an' he went fer me. I lost him; yes, I did; but he jes' got me."

"Who was it, Jake?"

"Dunno, Miss Alice; but he am a terror, whoober he is. He jes' laid me out; den he goes off. Den I goes ter de hidin'-place, an' de fust t'ing I knows I've got company dat I didn't inwite."

"The man found his way into the den?"

"Yes, he did."

"I warned you, Jake."

"Yes, indeed yer did."

"But you escaped?"

"No, I didn't."

"How is it you are here?"

"Dat yere man let dis yere chile go."

"He let you go free?"

"Yes, he did, Miss Alice. He claim dat he am yer frien'."

"Describe him."

"Can't describe him, miss."

"You can't describe him?"

"No."

"How is that? You are usually pretty cute in remembering how people look."

"Yes, I is; but dis yere man change heself. Yes, he does. No one can describe him."

"I know who he is, Jake."

"Am he a fr'en'?"

"I don't know, Jake. What did he say to you?"

Jake repeated the conversation he had held with our hero, and described all that had occurred.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

"I do not know what to think of this man, Jake," said Alice.

"Dat am my case, Miss Alice."

"He may be a friend."

"Dat am so."

"On the contrary, he may be a fellow working in the interest of the man Ward."

"And dat may be so, too, Miss Alice."

"What can his object be?"

"I ges dis yere chile kin ges."

"Well?"

"He am trying to discover Mr. Arthur. That is just what I fear, Miss Alice. He find dis yere chile easy enough."

"Some one else found you."

"Dat am true."

"Jake, he may know where I am."

"Dat am sure, Miss Alice."

"What shall we do?"

"I'se boddern' my head 'bout dat now, Miss Alice. But dar am one ting: dey can't harm you, dey can't harm me; we ain't done nuffin'."

"But that man Ward may harm me. He is capable of committing any crime."

"See here, Miss Alice; I'se an idea. Yer jes' let dat yere man found you; and I'll jes' lay aroun', and I'll squelch him forebber!"

"No, no, Jake; that will never do."

"What are yer gwine ter do?"

"I must think matters over. Jake, you keep out of sight until to-night, then come here, and by that time I will have decided."

"I'll jes' lay aroun' yere, Miss Alice."

"No; it will not be safe. You can hide until night, and then come here."

"All right, Miss Alice."

"Now go, Jake. I am very nervous."

"About my being aroun' here?"

"About everything."

"All right. I'se gwine, and I'll come aroun' ag'in ter-night."

The negro walked away, and the girl Alice sat down under a tree. She appeared lost in deep thought.

Henry waited until Jake had got well away, when suddenly he appeared in the presence of the girl. The latter leaped to her feet, and Henry said:

"Do not fear, miss."

The girl gazed in silence, and her face betrayed her terror.

"You have nothing to fear, miss."

Henry was disguised. The girl did not recognize him as the man she had been talking to the night previous.

The detective said:

"You do not recognize me?"

"Who are you?" came the question.

"I am the man who was talking to you last night. I am the man who ferreted out your colored friend, Jake, the man who rescued him from arrest."

"And why do you follow me?"

"Because, as I told him, I am your friend, and there must now be perfect confidence between us. We are bent on the same purpose. You know that Arthur Vannoy is an innocent man. So do I. You seek him to save him. I am seeking him for the same purpose."

"It is false. You are seeking him to betray him."

"No; if I were, I'd arrest Jake, and I'd arrest you, and thereby take from his aid his friends. I know a great deal, but there are facts I am yet to learn. You can aid me."

"I can not."

"You can prove to me that Vannoy is innocent."

"You say you know he is innocent?"

"I do; and yet I have not the actual proofs. You can establish his innocence."

"If I could have done so I would have cleared him at the trial."

"Then you are not certain of his innocence?"

"I am certain of his innocence; but I can not prove it."

"You can aid me in finding the proofs."

"Do you seek proof of his innocence?"

"I do."

"Who are you?"

"Will you believe me if I tell you?"

"You can prove your identity?"

"I can."

"Will you?"

"Yes."

"Do so."

"Arthur Vannoy was accused of murder?"

"Yes."

"Accused of killing a man named Branton?"

"Yes."

"He was convicted?"

"He was."

"He escaped from prison?"

"He did."

"You aided him?"

The girl did not respond.

"I can prove you aided him, and by your act you have laid yourself liable to arrest. I do not arrest you, and that proves I am your friend."

"What authority have you to arrest me?"

The detective smiled, and said:

"Now I will establish my own identity."

"Do so."

"A number of detectives are hunting for Vannoy?"

"Yes, so I understand."

"I am a detective. I was sent from New York to aid in his recapture. I followed up several trails, and in doing so became convinced that I was seeking to run down an innocent man."

The girl looked at the detective searchingly.

"You are convinced that he is an innocent man?"

"I am."

"What led you to the conviction?"

"I started out under the guidance of my experience. I first shadowed Ward, the man who appeared so singularly anxious to convict Vannoy. I soon suspected that he was a villain. Later I satisfied myself that my suspicions were correct, and then I began to reason, and I reached a second conclusion."

"And what is your second conclusion?"

"I am convinced that Ward has some purpose in getting Vannoy out of the world—that he has something to gain."

The girl's face became very expressive.

"This is your present conclusion?"

"It is."

"Did you have any suggestions from any one that led you to this conclusion?"

"No."

"And do you know what the real purpose of Ward is?"

"No, I do not; I am here to learn the facts from you."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THERE followed a moment's silence. Henry and the girl Alice eyed each other closely.

The latter was attired in a neat black dress. It was the first time our hero had seen her thus arrayed, and it was the first time he had enjoyed an opportunity to study her face. He was charmed by its real beauty. She was one of the most interesting girls he had ever beheld, and her dark dress was very becoming to her.

After a little time she said:

"I can give you no information."

"Oh, yes, you can."

"I can not."

"If you refuse, you will always regret your refusal. I can be of service to you, and also of service to your friend Vannoy. The time may come when you may wish to communicate with me, and then it may be too late for me to aid you."

"I can give you no information."

"Then you distrust me?"

The girl remained silent.

"You refuse to give me the information?"

"I am not at liberty to do so."

"You are."

"You appear very positive."

"I am."

"Why are you so positive?"

"I have been told that you could give me all the information."

"Who told you so?"

"Shall I tell you?"
"Certainly."
"Mr. Allen told me so."
The girl gave a start, and her beautiful eyes glowed with a strange light.
"Mr. Allen told you I could give you information?"
"Yes."
"You are a friend of Mr. Allen?"
I will tell you the truth: I never saw him until I entered upon this case. We have become friends."
"Can you so prove to me?"
"I can; but I am discouraged. I now propose to turn against you."
"You propose to turn against me?"
"I do. You will not treat me as a friend. I become your foe."
"And what will you do?"
"I will arrest Jake, to begin with, and I may arrest you. Nothing prevents me from doing so. If I were your enemy, I could have done so before. I will atone for my delay." The girl looked perplexed.
"Do not turn against me!" she pleaded.
"I am a busy man. You give me nothing to do on your side, so I must act on the other."
"What do you want me to do?"
"I want you to tell me the story of Arthur Vannoy."
"Why are you so anxious to hear about him?"
"I wish absolute proof of his innocence, that is, proof satisfactory to me."
"And when you get that proof?"
"I will follow up Ward, force him to a full confession, and close in on him."
"Ah, I wish I were sure I could trust you."
"You can. Rest assured that if you trust me you make a friend, and one who can really serve you. In one way I am disappointed."
"How?"
"I thought I was one to inspire confidence, but it appears I can not do so with you."
"Let me think," said the girl.
"All right, think on."
The detective stopped short. He heard a strange signal whistle, and resuming after a moment, he said, at the same time observing the pallor of the girl's face:
"Did you hear that?"
"I did," came her answer in a trembling voice.
"It is Jake signaling to you."
"It is."
"He has something to report."
"Yes."
"Shall I go away?"
"Yes; but return; I must speak further with you."
The detective dodged behind a tree, and a moment later Jake appeared. The girl had answered his signal.
"Oh, missy, dar's somet'ing going on."
"What has happened, Jake?"
"I've seen dat dere Ward. He am comin' dis yere way, shuah. He am comin' for you, and I se gwine ter stay here. Dar am gwine ter be trouble now, dat am shuah."
"You must not remain here, Jake."
"Yes, I is gwine ter stay here, Miss Alice. Dey are not gwine ter take you away. I se dead set on that."
"Jake, I have a protector. You will be in the way. Your presence will complicate matters. You must hasten away, and keep in hiding."
"Did yer say yer hab a frien', Miss Alice?"
"Yes."
"Who am your frien'?"
"I can not tell now, Jake; but it is all right. Hasten away, so I can arrange for what is to come."
"Does yer mean it, Miss Alice?"
"I do."
"Kin I lay aroun'?"
"Yes, if you keep out of sight; but you must not be seen unless you hear the signal from me. Now go away quickly."
Jake glided away, and our hero approached the fair girl once more.
"You heard what Jake said?"
"I did."
"What do you think?"
"It is possible that Ward has traced you down to your cover."
"What are his intentions?"
"He means you harm."
"What can I do?"
"You can trust me."
"And if I do?"
"I will take care of Ward."
"I will trust you. What shall I do?"
"Go into the house and remain there until you hear a signal from me."
"Will you meet Ward?"
"I will take care of him."
"He may come legally prepared?"
"You need not fear. He will return with a sore head possibly." The girl returned to the house, and our hero worked a transform, and then he proceeded along toward the turnpike. He had not gone far before he met Ward. The man was accompanied by a companion. Our hero looked like a farmer. He approached Ward and looked at him sharply, and Ward returned his stare, and after a moment Ward demanded:
"Do you live around here?"
"I do," was the disguised detective's answer.

CHAPTER XXXV.

HENRY'S transform was a good one. He looked the farmer through and through, and after Ward's question, the latter meditated a moment before asking:
"Do you own this farm around here?"
"What business is it of yours whether I do or not?"
"Don't get angry, old man."
"I am not angry; but you have no right to question me."
"I do not mean to be offensive. You are a law-abiding citizen?"
"I think I am; are you?"
"Yes, I am. And now tell me, who lives in that house beyond there?"
"I do," came the untruthful answer.
"Your place is for sale, is it not?"
"No."
"You would sell it for a big price?"
"What do you call a big price?"
"Take me through your house and I will make you an offer."
"You can buy a place about a mile down the road."
"What place?"
"The place where that strange young lady is stopping."
"What strange young lady?"
"The lady that all the people are talking about."
"Where is the house?"
"A mile or two down the turnpike." Ward exchanged glances with his companion, and said:
"We will go and look at that place." The two men turned off and walked along down the turnpike, and our hero returned to the house, imitated Jake's signal, and a few minutes later he was joined by Alice.
"That man has a suspicion as to your whereabouts. He intends to do you harm. You had better trust me."
"I will."
"Do so quickly, and I will know how to act."
"I will tell you the whole story."
"Do so."
"Arthur Vannoy is the son of an Englishman who came to this country and married an American woman. Mr. Vannoy, the elder, was the younger son of a rich manufacturer who died a few years ago, leaving his estate to his eldest son. This son, a brother of Arthur Vannoy, died a year ago, and Arthur is his legal heir and nearest of kin. It appears, however, that there is a cousin who would inherit after Arthur. Ward is the step-father of this cousin. He determined to kill off Arthur Vannoy, and not daring to commit murder, invented a strange and daring plan to accomplish his design. A year ago Arthur made the acquaintance of a handsome young Englishman, and the two became great friends, and about eight months ago, as you know, Branton was supposed to have been murdered by Vannoy."
"Supposed to have been murdered?"
"Yes."
"You think he is still alive?"
"I know he is alive."
"Explain."
"I have evidence that his Branton is a relative of Ward. He is a fairly wealthy young man. He entered into a scheme, arranging to aid in having it appear that he was murdered. The intention was to have a trap and trick Vannoy. The death of the latter as an assassin would be public and open, and Ward's step-son would come into the property."
"You say you know Branton is alive?"
"Yes."
"How do you know it?"
"He has been seen alive."
"By whom?"
"My sister."
"Why did you not appear at the trial?"
"He was not seen until after the conviction of Vannoy."
"What relation do you bear to Vannoy?"
"He is my cousin on his mother's side. He has no other relatives beyond myself, my sister, and—"
The girl stopped.
"Proceed," said Henry.
"He is to marry my sister."
"Are you and your sister twins?"
"We are."
"And your sister saw Branton alive?"
"Yes."
"How did you learn all the facts?"
"I went to England immediately after the supposed death of Branton."
"At whose suggestion?"
"My own."
"You aided Vannoy to escape?"
"Yes."
"Why did you not place these facts in the hands of a lawyer?"
"We should have done so if we had not succeeded in getting Vannoy away out of prison."
"What was your ultimate purpose?"
"To run down Branton."
"And then?"
"We would, of course, prove Arthur's innocence."
"You are certain Branton lives?"
"Yes."
"And you are certain he entered into the scheme?"
"Yes."
"Where is your sister?"
"Emily is on the track of Branton."
"Where is Vannoy?"
"I do not know."

"Is this true?"
"It is."
"It is fortunate you told me all this."
"I feel that I have done right."
"I now have something to work on. But how can you communicate with Vannoy?"
"He will come forth the moment it is announced that Branton has been found alive."
"And you are positive that Branton will be found?"
"Yes."
"How lately did your sister see him?"
"About three weeks ago."
"Where?"
"In New York City."
"Why did she not have him arrested?"
"She lost sight of him."
"And you are not now in communication with Vannoy?"
"No."
"Does Ward know of your interference in the case?"
"It is evident he now suspects it."
"The death of Vannoy carries the property to the step-son absolutely?"
"Yes."
"By entail?"
"Yes."
"Have you ever talked with Branton or Ward?"
"No."
"Has your sister?"
"No."
"How did you recognize him?"
"By a photograph and a description."
"Who gave the description?"
"Arthur."
"Then your identification is not positive?"
"Yes, it is positive."
"Then I will find this man," said Henry.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE narrative the detective had listened to was complete and positive, and fully confirmed his original theory concerning the innocence of the young man Vannoy.
"I am glad you have made me your confidant," said Henry.
"Do you believe my story?"
"I do."
"Now, what can we do?"
"We have an easy task before us."
"Will you find Arthur?"
"No; I will find Branton. I see through it all: this man Branton entered into the conspiracy; he is secreting himself."
"Yes."
"A body was found and identified?"
"Yes."
"Who was the dead man?"
"I do not know; the face was mutilated. The identification of the dead man was upon superficial testimony."

The detective thought the whole matter over, and finally said:

"It will not do for you to fall into this man's hands. It might put you to a great deal of inconvenience, and I will ask that you and Jake leave town for a few days, and leave this whole affair to me."

"I am prepared to follow your advice."

"You can depend upon me. I will make short work of this man."

"How will you proceed?"

"Where is your sister?"

"She is in the town of ——."

"And she met Branton in New York?"

"Yes. She goes down to the city every day watching for him again."

"You expected your sister here?"

"Only in case she found the man."

"Then she was to report to you in person?"

"Yes."

"I must see your sister. Telegraph her to come right on here, or, rather, to the town below here on the railroad. You go there at once."

The detective advised Alice just how to proceed, and within three hours from the time he first met her, she and Jake were on the train. The telegram had been sent.

In the meantime, our hero, who had proceeded in such a sure and certain manner, arrayed himself in his ordinary attire and called upon Mr. Selleck.

He had a letter of introduction from the chief of police in New York, also one from the district attorney; and upon presenting himself he made it appear that he had just arrived in town.

He found Mr. Selleck in his office, and presented his letters. The country attorney glanced over the two missives, and then said:

"Well, sir, how do you propose to proceed?"

Henry smiled, and asked:

"What instructions have you for me, sir?"

"None whatever."

"Can I talk with you without being interrupted?"

"Yes, sir."

"What is your opinion of this man Ward?"

The question was asked abruptly.

"I have no opinion."

Again the detective smiled, and then said:

"You should have a very good opinion of him."

"Why, sir?"

"Because he has made a great 'guy' of you."

Mr. Selleck glared.

"That is an odd statement, sir."

"Yes, and one that must be explained."

"Does it really need an explanation?"

"It does."

"Do you not already suspect, sir, that he has 'guyed' you?"

"How guyed me?"

"You are talking in an extraordinary manner, sir."

"Yes, the circumstances are very extraordinary, but you do not answer my question."

"Repeat your question."

"Do you not suspect that this man Ward has fooled you?"

"How fooled me?"

"Led you to convict an innocent man."

"No, sir; I indulge no such suspicion."

"I am sorry," said the detective in a peculiar tone.

"You are sorry?"

"I am."

"For me?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Because your answer offers a very peculiar suggestion."

"It does?"

"Yes."

"How?"

"It suggests that you are in the conspiracy."

"Conspiracy, sir?"

"Yes."

"What conspiracy?"

"A conspiracy to hang an innocent man. How much have you received as your share?"

"How dare you!"

"Oh, I dare anything. Let me tell you something, sir. You are a rogue or a fool."

"Do you know to whom you are talking?"

"I do. I am talking to the prosecuting officer of this county."

"Then be careful what you say."

"I have considered every word I have said."

"Will you explain what you mean?"

"No, sir."

"Why not?"

"It is not necessary."

"What can prevent the necessity?"

"A confession from you that will prove you are an innocent man."

"Your words are extraordinary. If you had not presented letters to me, I should conclude I was really talking to a lunatic."

"You will reach a different conclusion before we are through."

"What do you want me to do?"

"Confess that you suspect this man Ward; that there is a possibility that he may be a villain."

"I will admit that much," came the answer.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

"AHA! you dare admit as much as that?"

"There is a possibility, that is all I admit."

"There is a possibility that Ward is a rogue?"

"Yes."

"When did you reach that conclusion?"

"Within the last few days."

"There is another possibility."

"And what is that?"

"A possibility that, deceived by Ward, you convicted an innocent man."

"No, no; the evidence was unassailable."

"Yes, concocted."

"Sir, are you here to combat the action of the law or to recapture an escaped convict?"

"I am here in the interest of justice, sir."

"I do not understand you."

"Can I rely upon your discretion?"

"You can, sir."

"And your silence until the proper time arrives for to speak?"

"You can, sir."

"If Branton is alive Vannoy is innocent, at least of his murder?"

"That is true," was the admission in a trembling voice.

"And your conviction is null?"

"Yes, sir; if Branton lives, the conviction is practically a farce."

"Branton lives."

The attorney glared, and demanded:

"Are you a perfectly sane man, sir?"

"I appeal to the letters I brought you."

"Your statement is a startling one."

"Yes, very."

"Can you prove it?"

"I can."

Mr. Selleck became very thoughtful, but at length said:

"You used the word conspiracy?"

"I did."

"Advisedly?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you can prove it?"

"I propose to do so with your aid."

"I will aid you."

"I can trust you."

"You can."

"You are an official?"

"I am."

"And I am an official also. If you do not maintain silence, you betray a public trust."

"I fully intended it so."

The detective told the story of Vannoy, and when he had concluded, Mr. Selleck asked:

"Why was this not brought out in the trial?"

"For excellent reasons."

"And you say Branton lives?"

"Yes."

"Who was the dead man?"

"That is a mystery for Ward to solve after I have produced Branton."

"And you propose to produce Branton?"

"I do."

"Then I should arrest Ward?"

"No, sir; you must only watch him. In the meantime, I wish you to be present secretly at a meeting between myself and Ward."

"Will you arrange it?"

"I will."

The detective opened up his plan, and finally arranged to carry it out.

A little later, after the departure of the detective, Ward entered the district attorney's office, and the latter asked:

"Have you secured any clews?"

"No. A man called here and asked to see you."

"Called here?"

"Yes."

"Why did he call here?"

"He called to obtain your address."

"Who was the man?"

"I do not know him. He was a miserable-looking fellow. He left a note for you."

"A note for me?"

"Yes; here it is."

Mr. Selleck handed the man a note written on a dirty piece of paper. The note read:

"I must see you at once. I bring word from B—.

"Yours, H."

Ward turned pale.

"Is it important?" demanded Mr. Selleck.

"Oh, no."

"I thought it might be a clew, you appeared so excited."

"Did I appear excited?"

"You did."

"It is nothing."

Ward only remained a few moments and went away, and the moment he had gone there came a strange look in the eyes of Mr. Selleck, and he muttered:

"I fear—I fear."

It was just ten o'clock at night when Ward went to the railroad station. He appeared pale and anxious, and after a little time a man approached him. The man made a signal; Ward responded, and the stranger approached and whispered:

"Come with me."

"I can not go far."

"Only out of sight."

"One moment, my friend."

Ward looked around; no one was in sight. He showed a cocked revolver, and said:

"If you attempt any tricks, you are a dead man!"

"I intend no tricks."

"What is it you want?"

"I have an important communication to make."

"I can listen to you here."

"Let us go over behind that car, that's all."

The man pointed to a freight-car on a side track.

"You mean some game."

"On my life, I do not. But my communication is an important one; no one must hear it. Every one is on the alert in this town."

Both men spoke in very low tones.

"I will go with you, but, remember, the first suspicious move on your part, and you are a dead man!"

"I will meet all consequences."

The two men went to the freight-car, and then, in a very low tone, the stranger said:

"I bring you word from Branton."

"From Branton?" repeated Ward.

"Yes, from Branton."

"Branton is dead."

The stranger laughed, and exclaimed:

"I am not an apparition."

"What do you mean?"

"I am not a spirit messenger."

"I do not understand you."

"My words are plain. Dead men do not send messages. I told you I brought you a message from Branton. If he were dead, I repeat, he could not send a message. What do you take me for?"

"But Branton is dead."

The messenger, in reply, only laughed.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

It was an odd sort of situation. The stranger announced a message, and the man to whom the message was to be delivered declared the purported sender of the message dead.

At length the messenger said:

"I suppose, as Branton is dead, I need not deliver the message?"

Ward meditated. It was evident he was bothered.

"I would like to have the message *some one* has sent to me."

"That won't do."

"What won't do?"

"What you ask me."

"Why not?"

"This message is to you. It is sent by Branton."

"But Branton is dead."

"He was not dead when he sent *his last message to you*."

Ward started, and said:

"I'd like to know who you are."

"It does not make any difference who I am. I bring you a message. You declare the sender dead. That ends it. Your schemes may all be blocked, however, owing to your disbelief, or, rather, your pretended belief."

"Tell me who you are."

"No, I will not."

"Deliver your message."

"No, I will not."

"You came with a message to me?"

"No; I guess I've struck the wrong man. I was to deliver a message to a man who expected it."

Ward gave evidence of his perplexity.

"You were sent with a message to me?"

"I say I am not sure of that. My message was sent to Mr. Ward. I do not know Mr. Ward personally. I may be tricked."

"I am Ward."

"Then you know that Branton lives?"

"I admit it."

"Why did you deny it?"

"It is not safe under all the circumstances to admit a fact like that. I desired to test you."

"Are you satisfied with your test?"

"I am; what is your message?"

"Branton has been run down."

Ward uttered an exclamation—a cry that sounded like a wail of terror.

"He has been run down?"

"Not exactly run down. He has been seen and recognized."

"By whom?"

"A woman."

"What woman?"

"A woman named Cleaves."

Ward actually trembled.

"When did she run him down?"

"He is satisfied that the woman has been on his track. There is a man directing the shadow."

"He has not been fully identified?"

"He believes he has been fully identified."

"He is not certain?"

"He is certain."

"Have they shadowed him to his hiding-place?"

"No; but he fears they will. One thing is certain, they know he is not dead; they know that the whole murder affair is a fake; they are ready, as soon as Vannoy is captured, to light down on you."

"This is indeed very important information."

"That is what Branton thought."

"He must not remain in New York."

"He wishes to consult with you about it. He will come here."

"No, he must not come here."

"He must see you."

"I will go to New York."

"When?"

"On the early train to-morrow."

"Better let him come here."

"No; not on any account."

"Why not?"

"There is a devil here who is on my track."

"Then this is not all new to you?"

"I know there is a man who is running close on my movements."

"That same man must have been running on your movements in New York."

"Are you a game man?"

"Well, they call me so."

"You can earn big money."

"How?"

"Aid me in capturing a certain man."

"Vannoy?"

"No."

"Whom?"

"The man who is on my track. I will abduct him."

"Better get Branton out of the way first."

"And the woman; she is here?"

"What woman?"

"The Cleaves woman, who you say identified Branton."

"No; she is in New York."

"How do you know?"

"I saw her there."

"When?"

"Only yesterday."

"You did?"

"I did."

"Then it looks bad."

"How bad?"

"They are playing you fine—they are working a double on you. Say, take my advice."

"What is your advice?"

"Your game is lost."

"No, no."

"It is, dead sure; and you and Branton had better get out of the country."

"Branton must leave."

"Will you see him?"

"Yes."
"When?"
"I will start to-morrow."
"I will meet you in New York."
"When?"
"To-morrow night."
"You will see Branton?"
"No need. You know where to find him."
"Do you?"
"No; he meets me; he comes to me. I can not go to him."
"Tell me who you are."
"It is strange you do not suspect my identity. Branton will tell you who I am when you see him. Now let us separate. I've an idea that every stranger in this town is being watched."
"What makes you think so?"
"I have an idea that some mysterious person is on my track."
"It can not be possible we were followed here?"
"No; I took good care to avoid that."
"When will I see you again?"
"To-morrow night, in New York."
"Where?"
The stranger named a place of meeting and an hour..
"I will meet you," said Ward.
"You will go to-morrow?"
"Yes."
"Sure?"
"Yes."
"Good-night."
The stranger glided away, and Ward also stole off, with a troubled look on his face.

A little later and the stranger returned, and a strange *dénouement* followed.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

As stated, the stranger returned to his position beside the freight-car, and a moment later a man crawled forth.

"Well, Mr. Selleck, what do you think now?" came the question.
"Let me think; give me time to breathe. It is the most terrible conspiracy that ever came to my knowledge. I will arrest Ward at once."

"Oh, no; you will not."
"I dare not do otherwise."
"Oh, yes, you dare."
"He will get away."
"No, he will not; but how easily he walked into our trap!"
"You are a wonderful man."
"Oh, no; but, on the other hand, I can say concerning the usual law officer, 'What fools we mortals be.'"
"What is your plan?"
"Ward goes to New York to-morrow?"
"Yes."
"I go on the train with him."
"I see."
"I will meet him in New York."
"I see."
"When he parts with me he will go straight to Branton."
"I see."
"I will follow him."
"Well?"

"I will take a warrant from here and arrest both men."
"A magnificent scheme. And now tell me what led you to suspect this man?"
"That is immaterial. One thing, however, is certain—Vannoy is an innocent man."
"He is. Do you know where to find him?"
"I do not; but when you announce that Branton is alive he will certainly come from his cover."
"That is true."

"Then we will not bother about Vannoy; Branton is the man we want. Will you follow me to New York?"

"I will."
"And bring the necessary papers with you?"
"I will."

The detective arranged to have the prosecuting attorney posted, also made other arrangements, and then departed.

That same night our hero met Alice. To her he disclosed all that had occurred, and arranged for her to go to New York also on the same train with Mr. Selleck.

At an early hour the following morning, our hero, well disguised, was at the depot, and he espied Ward. The man was on his way to the city. He boarded the train, and our hero, under his cover as a plain old farmer, also boarded the train. He took a seat in the same car with his man, determined not to lose sight of him, and he did not. In due time the train arrived in New York. Ward went to a hotel and registered, and the detective lay about on the watch. He saw his man go to the meeting-place, and having made up for the tryst, he was on hand. The two men met.

"You are here?"
"Yes."
"How did you get here?"
"I came on the midnight train."
"Have you seen or heard anything?"
"No."
"You have not seen Branton?"
"No."
"He does not know I am in New York?"
"No."
"I dare not go to him."
"Why not?"

"I can not tell who has been on my track. There is a mysterious *some one* who has been shadowing me."

"Can you not send a message to Branton to meet you?"
"I can. I've thought of that."
"It is your scheme."
"Who can I send?"
"Send me."
"I am not certain as to your identity."
"You know that Branton made me his messenger?"
"Yes, I will trust you. I can do nothing else."
"I will be the safest man."
"Where will I meet him?"
"Let him go to your hotel."
"I am stopping at the —— House."
"Your room?"
"No. 187."
"Where will I find Branton?"

Ward gave an address, and said that Branton had been living at this house under the name of McMeekan.

"All right. I will find Mr. McMeekan, and bring him to you." The two men separated, and our hero muttered:

"He may not be as great a fool as I take him to be. I can call upon McMeekan any time. I will follow Ward. He shall not play me."

Ward walked away, and our hero again worked a transform and started on the track of his man. Later on the wisdom of his little game was verified.

Ward did not go to his hotel. He proceeded to a large tenement house in the lower part of the city. He ascended the stairs to the top floor, and rapped at the door of the rear room. There came no response to his rap, and a moment later he rapped, signal-fashion, and then the door was opened.

Henry Brock had followed his man. He saw him enter the tenement house, and crept up the stairs after him. He heard the rap on the door, and when the signal-rap followed, the detective muttered:

"Well, I guess!"
He perceived that indeed Ward had sought to give him the slip, and congratulated himself upon not being fooled and thrown off the track.

He waited until Ward entered the room, and the moment the door was closed, he crawled forward and peeped through the key-hole into the room.

He carried a little instrument of his own invention which enabled him to see quite clearly, and at the first glance he mentally mured:

"Well, it is as I supposed. The jig is all up now. I've got my man. The dead, sentimentally speaking, has come to life. Mr. Branton, I'm glad to see you. It was a nice game, but the best arranged plans of men and mice 'aft gang aglee'."

Henry Brock was positively assured that the supposed murdered man Branton was before him, and he felt the pleasant consciousness of one who had performed a great deed. His work had been excellent. He had started out lacking a single clew, and on his own natural powers of observation alone had run down one of the most cunningly devised conspiracies that had ever come under his notice. He quietly settled down to listen to what the two men might say to each other.

CHAPTER XL.

The detective was at the door in time to hear the occupant of the room say:

"What you here?"
"Yes; and did you not expect me?"
"No."
"You did not expect me?"
"I did not."

The two men had seated themselves at a table on which burned a large lamp. The listener could see both of their faces, and observed the look of astonishment on the face of Ward when the man, whom we shall call Branton, answered "I did not."

"You did not send a messenger to me?"
"I did not."
"Say that you did."
"I did not, and I do not understand what you mean."

"You did not send a message to me that you had been seen and recognized?"
"I did not."

"Do you know or suspect that you have been seen or recognized?"
"No."

"Bran, things look bad."
"What do you mean?"
"Last night a man came to me and told me he brought a message from you."

"I sent no man to you."
"He told me you had been seen and recognized."
"It is not true; but I am glad you are here."

"Yes, it is lucky I am here; and if I had not been cautious, some one else would have been here."

"Who?"
Ward related all that had occurred, and Branton said:
"It is as I feared; our scheme is a failure."

"Not yet."
"Who is the man on your track?"
"I do not know."
"One thing is certain, it is known that the murder story is a fake."
"How so?"
"The scheme played on you was intended to run me down."

They would not have attempted such a scheme unless they knew that I was to be found."

"You are mistaken. They may suspect it; they do not know it."

"Either way, it looks bad for us."

"It is all right as long as you are not found."

"It is evident, however, that the man on our track is a dangerous man."

"Yes, a very dangerous man; but I will take care of him."

"How?"

"I will arrange it."

"Ward, we are beat."

"Not so."

"I tell you yes; and the best thing for us to do is to his ourselves to Mexico."

"Man you are crazy!"

"No; you are crazy, to think you can carry out this scheme."

"The scheme is all right."

"It is a failure, and was bound to prove one. Why did you not abduct this man—or, better, kill him?"

"That would not do."

"Why not?"

"If we had abducted him there would have been no proof of his death."

"Then you might have killed him."

"That would not do. It would have left the door open to dispute as to the identity of the dead man. I took the right course—having him tried for murder—and having settled the business, his identity, death and burial would have been verified officially, and all we would have had to do would have been to take possession."

"But your scheme has failed."

"No, sir; Vannoy has been tried and condemned."

"That is true; but he has escaped."

"Sooner or later he will be recaptured."

"But it is now known that I am alive."

"No, it is not."

"The fact is fully and clearly suspected."

"But you will not be discovered."

"They may get a stay on the presumption that I am living."

"That will not avail unless you are produced in court."

"Are not the chances of running me down as good as the chance of running down Vannoy?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"You will go away."

"Go where?"

"To Mexico; and then the road will be clear."

"I should have gone there in the first place."

"I said so; but you maintained that you could conceal your presence effectually. You have failed."

"I have not failed."

"It is evident that you have."

"Do you think I have been seen?"

"Yes."

"By whom?"

"I can not tell by whom."

"Who would know me?"

"We can not tell. One thing is certain; a wonderful man is on your track."

"And he will run us down."

"Never."

"What shall I do?"

"You will have to escape."

"Where will I go?"

"To Mexico."

"How can I go?"

"You will start West on the very first train. Go overland to Mexico, and then I can defy them all, and I will put men on the track of Vannoy who will find him."

"You have already offered a large reward."

"I will offer a larger one."

"My advice is different."

"What do you advise?"

"That we both go to Mexico while we have a chance, or we may both go somewhere else."

"Go where?"

"Into an American prison for life."

"Nonsense!"

"We have committed a crime; if I am captured, the whole conspiracy will be exposed."

"We will not be caught."

"The man who led you here has not lost sight of you."

"Yes; I fooled him. He has gone on a goose-chase."

"You may think so and be mistaken."

"I know what I am doing."

"But, according to your own story, he has fooled you again and again."

"He will never fool me another time."

The detective thought his opportunity was presented, and a startling dénouement followed.

CHAPTER XLI

HENRY BROCK was a man of great personal strength. He was also, as has been intimated, an athlete, and his courage was unquestioned, and now he had determined upon a very bold undertaking. The two men whom he had resolved to confront were desperate men. They were like a chased animal at bay, prepared to fight.

Carefully the detective prepared himself for the desperate part he was to enact. He had learned that through some oversight, or possibly because of a sense of present absolute security, the two

men had failed to lock the door of the room. All he would have to do was to turn the knob, push the door open, and he would stand face to face with the conspirators. He did turn the knob, push the door open, and stagger into the room. The two men leaped to their feet and gazed in amazement, and the detective also came to a halt, drew himself up, and appeared to gaze in amazement as he demanded:

"Halloo! vot vos you two fellers do in mine room, eh?"

Both men uttered a sigh of relief. They believed the seemingly drunken man had made a mistake, and had entered the wrong room.

"My friend," said Branton, "you have made a mistake."

"Vat vos dot?"

"You have made a mistake."

"I vos make a mistake, eh?"

"Yes."

"How vos dot?"

"You are in the wrong room."

"I vos in der wrong room?"

"Yes."

"No; you vos made a mistake. Dis vos mine room, and you fellers must get outd."

"This is not your room; it is mine."

"It vos yours, eh?"

"Yes."

"Who vos you?"

"My name is Brown."

"Your name vos Brown, eh?"

"Yes."

"Den you vos in der wrong room, and you vos get outd mighty quick. Mine name vos Branton; dis vos mine room."

The effect of the detective's words was indeed startling. Both men uttered an ejaculation, and then both drew weapons. The detective, however, more quickly drew his club, and the way he knocked the two men down was a caution. In less time than it takes to relate it he had the irons on both scoundrels, and when he had them secured, he sat down, and looking at the wretches, he demanded:

"What are you going to do about it?"

"You will pay for this outrage," said Ward.

"I will, eh?" The detective laughed, and added: "Mr. Ward, your jig is up; I've got you down fine, and this ghost also."

Ward had time to think, and he said:

"We will talk this matter over."

"Go ahead."

"Who are you?"

"I am an officer."

"A detective?"

"Yes."

"You think you have run down a big conspiracy?"

"That is my opinion at present."

"How much money, cash down, will it take to change your opinion?"

"How much will you give me?"

"One hundred thousand dollars."

"When will you pay the money?"

"To-night—on condition that you agree to let me get away."

"You two men will go with me. Negotiations are closed."

"Do you mean you will accept the money?"

"No; I mean you two scoundrels will pay the penalty for your crimes."

An hour later, and our detective was in the presence of the chief. He had his two prisoners under lock and key. To the chief he told the whole story, and his wonderful tale was listened to with great attention.

On the morning following the incidents we have recorded, Henry met Mr. Selleck and told the story of his wonderful success, and a little later the prosecuting officer was on his way to the town where the supposed murder had occurred. A pair of officers accompanied him with the two prisoners in custody.

In the meantime, Henry sought out Alice. He had told her to remain at the town where he had first seen her sister Emily leave the train on the day he first struck a clew as to the possibilities in the great conspiracy.

He met the lady in a neat little parlor, and his first words were:

"Well, what do you guess?"

Alice did not answer, and the detective said:

"I have found him."

"Whom?"

"Branton."

Henry related all that had occurred, and a few moments later he was introduced to the girl Emily, a sister of Vannoy. He recognized her at a glance, and after a time, he asked:

"And now, where is Vannoy?"

"I do not know."

"Is it true you do not know?"

"It is true."

"Did you not assist him to escape?"

"I did."

"And you tell me you do not know where he is?"

"I do."

"Have you not been in communication with him?"

"I have not."

A few days passed. The story of the conspiracy came out, not as a conspiracy, but as a great mistake. The singular facts appeared in all the papers, and yet Vannoy did not show up.

Our hero was in daily communication with the two girls, but no word came from the missing man, and finally Henry said:

"I think I will have to get down to work again. Give me such facts as you possess."

Alice related to the detective all the facts of the escape, and our

hero sat down to think out a theory, and he was in his room pondering the matter over, when he chanced to glance at an old newspaper lying upon the floor. It was the announcement of the discovery of a dead body found floating in the river, and he muttered.

"A man born to be drowned will never be hung!"

CHAPTER XLII.

HENRY carefully read over the description. He was seated at the time in a little hotel parlor of the town where the two girls lived. He held the paper in his hand, and was lost in deep thought, when he heard a sob. He looked up, and Alice stood over him. She had seen the paper in his grasp. He was so immersed in thought he had not recognized her presence. She stood there and read over the whole account. Henry sought to hide the paper, when Alice said.

"It is too late; I have read it."

"Had you read it before?"

"No!"

"What do you think?"

"Alas! the mystery is explained."

"Explained?"

"Yes."

"How?"

"It is Arthur. I see it all."

"What do you see?"

"He must have gone to New York, and, made mad by the horror of his position and fearing recapture, he has chosen to die."

The face of the beautiful girl was a pitiful sight, as between her sobs she told her tale.

"If this is true, those men have succeeded after all."

"Yes."

"They will never enjoy their triumph."

"But poor Arthur?"

"I will investigate this. I will proceed to New York at once."

Henry gathered some additional facts from Alice, and proceeded to the great city. He went to the morgue, and while there was compelled to wait a little while before he had an opportunity to talk with the keeper, and a little later he saw an old man pass out. The detective was not thinking of the old man at that moment, and only cast a passing glance at him. He saw the keeper, and asked him a great many questions about the finding of the body, and all his inquiries agreed in fixing the identity of the dead, even on time coincidences.

After the talk had concluded, the keeper remarked:

"It's strange I had no inquiries about that body until to-day."

"Then I am the first one to make inquiries?"

"No."

"Some one else did?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"That old man who was just with me made inquiries, and he was more particular than you have been."

The detective was thoughtful for a moment, and then asked:

"Did he appear to know the man?"

"His inquiries were on the same line as yours."

Henry did not stay to continue his inquiries. He had caught sight of the old man, and that was enough. He left the morgue. He got on the street, and at once commenced a series of inquiries. He met an old peddler woman at last. She had noticed the old man. He had bought an apple from her.

The detective learned the direction the old man had taken. He followed step by step, and finally tracked by strict inquiry down to a certain locality, but there his perplexity began. He stood and looked around. It was a poor neighborhood. He commenced to question every one he met, and finally traced down to one particular house. It was a tenement building occupied by a great many families.

The detective finally learned that there was an old man living alone on the first floor. He entered and rapped. The door was opened. He saw an old man, and no mistake. He was baffled. The man who opened the door was not under disguise, and besides, he was not the old fellow the detective had seen at the morgue.

"I have made a mistake," he said.

Our hero was turning away, when he saw a second figure in the room, and at once he said:

"Let me see, your name is Smith?"

"No, sir; my name is not Smith."

It was a natural answer and a truthful one; and yet right here was discovered the marvelous quickness and perception of our hero. There was something in the tones of the old man which indicated that he was anxious to get rid of the man who had knocked at his door by mistake. The anxiety was very marked. It was enough for Henry. He determined to investigate. He pushed right into the room, and behold!—there stood the man he had met at the morgue, and the latter in a firm voice demanded:

"How dare you? What do you want here?"

"I want you," came the answer, quickly.

There followed a moment's silence, and the detective said:

"Arthur, it's no use; I recognize you."

The pretended old man stood and gazed aghast, and trembled when Henry said again:

"You have not read the papers lately."

Even as the detective spoke he beheld a certain movement that caused him to leap forward. He seized hold of the pretended old man, and exclaimed:

"No need for that. Branton lives, and is found; your innocence has been demonstrated."

There came an immediate change over the seeming old man.

"Who are you?" he demanded.

"Will you listen to me?"

"I will."

Henry told the whole story, and Arthur Vannoy acknowledged his identity, and, singularly enough, told a very wonderful story, which is a testimony to the old declaration that "there is a destiny that shapes our ends, rough-hew them as we will."

Arthur had not read the papers. He had lain in seclusion, completing his arrangements through the old man, with whom he lodged, for his final escape, when the excitement attending his escape had become somewhat allayed.

It was through an accident that he saw the paper concerning the finding of the body of a dead man who, as it appears, resembled him; and it had been with the design, through his friends, of fostering the suspicion as to the identity that he had ventured to the morgue; and thus it was that, in a most remarkable manner, he discovered himself to his friends.

Henry returned to the town where Alice was abiding. He had a rough-and-ready way of doing business, and he hustled Vannoy into the presence of the two girls, with the exclamation:

"Here he is!"

As our narrative is concerned alone with the deeds of our hero, we leave all further speculation to the imagination of our readers.

THE END.

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